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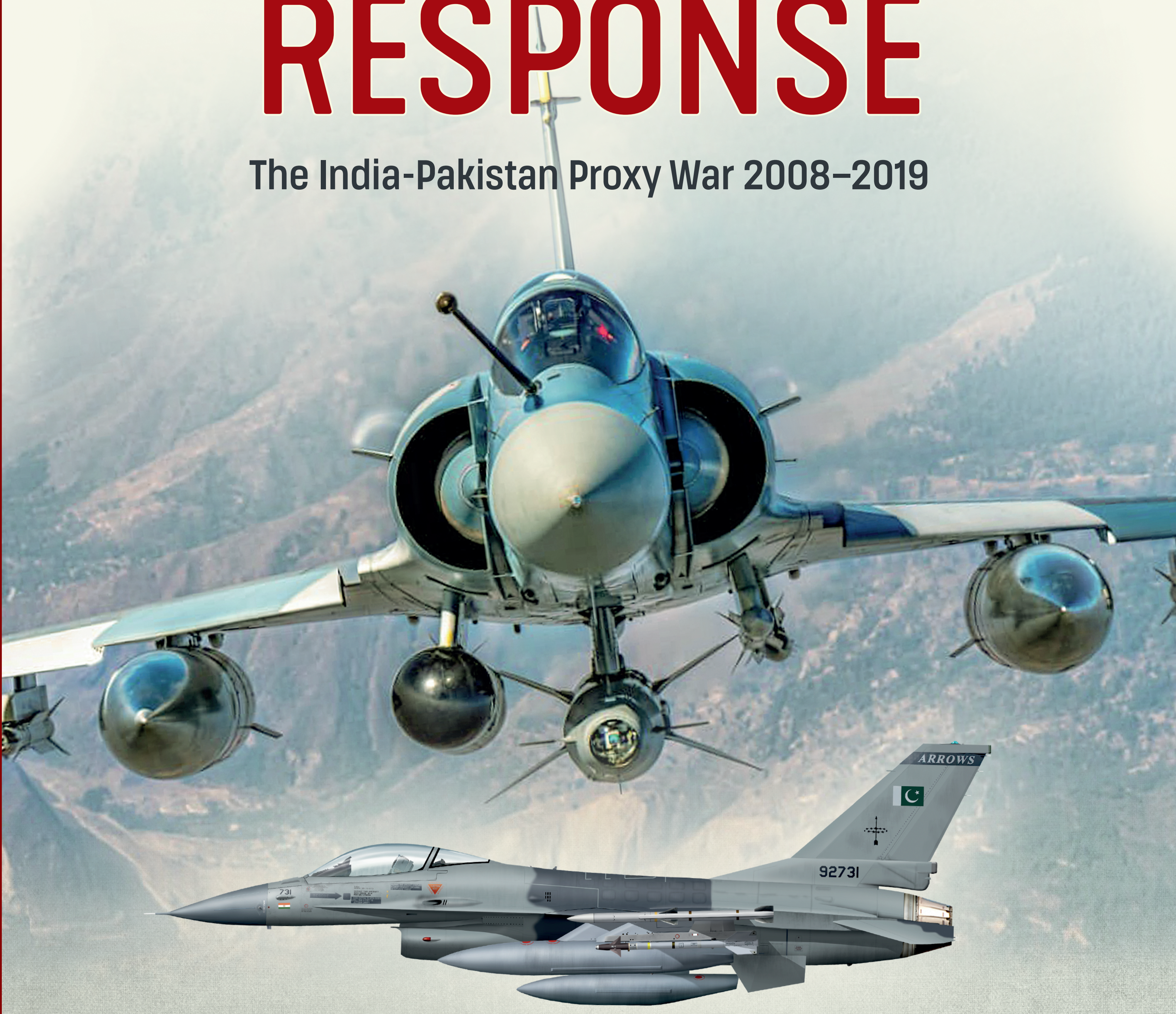
TERROR AND RESPONSE

The India-Pakistan Proxy War 2008–2019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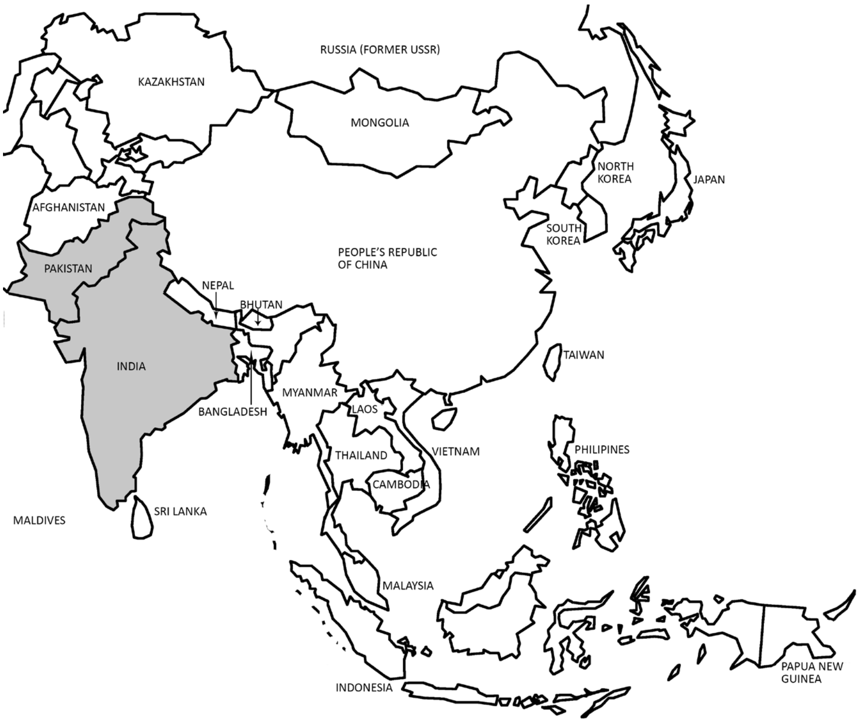
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Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
AAC	Army Aviation Corps (India)
AAM	Air-to-Air Missile
AB	Air Base
ACP	Assistant Commissioner of Police
AEW	Airborne Early Warning
AFSOD	Armed Forces Special Operations Division
AGPL	Actual Ground Position Line
AJF	Al Jehad Force
AM	Air Marshal
AMLF	Al Mustafa Liberation Fighters
AMF	Al Mujahid Force
APHC	All Parties Hurriat Conference
ASI	Assistant Sub-Inspector
AQ	Al Qaeda
AQUIS	Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
ARC	Aviation Research Centre (India)
ASCC	Air Standardisation Coordinating Committee
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
ATGM	Anti-Tank Guided Missile
ATS	Anti-Terrorism Squad
AUM	Al Umar Mujahideen
BARCAP	Barrier Combat Air Patrol
BEST	Bombay Electric Supply & Transport
BIT	Brigade Intelligence Team
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (India)
BLA	Balochistan Liberation Army
BSF	Border Security Force (India)
BVR	Beyond Visual Range
CAP	Combat Air Patrol
CAPF	Central Armed Police Forces
CBM	Confidence Building Measures
CCS	Cabinet Committee on Security
CO	Commanding Officer
COAS	Chief of Army Staff
COIN	Counter-Insurgency
CP	Commissioner of Police
CR	Control Room
CRC	Control and Reporting Centre
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CST	Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus
CTTF	Counter Terrorism Task Force
DCP	Deputy Commissioner of Police
DEM	Dukhtaran-e-Milat
DGMI	Director General Military Intelligence (India)
DGMO	Director General Military Operations
DMO	Director Military Operations
ECM	Electronic Counter-Measures
ELINT	Electronic Intelligence
EO	Electro-Optical
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FF	Frontier Force (Pakistan)
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GBU	Guided Bomb Unit
GCI	Ground-Controlled Interception
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSG-9	Grenzschutzgruppe 9
HAWS	High Altitude Warfare School (India)
HM	Hizb-ul-Mujahideen
HQN	Haqqani Network
HU	Helicopter Unit (Indian Air Force)
HUJI	Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami
HUM	Harkat-ul-Mujahideen
IAF	Indian Air Force
IB	Intelligence Bureau (India)
IBG	Integrated Battle Group
ICG	Indian Coast Guard
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe
IFSU	Intelligence and Field Surveillance Unit
IIM	Islami Inquilabi Mahaz
IJT	Islami Jamaat-e-Tulba
INC	Indian National Congress
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan)
ISIS	Islamic State/Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria(Daesh)
ISKP	Islamic State-Khorasan Province
ISL	Islamic Students League
ISPR	Inter Services Public Relations (Pakistan)
IST	Indian standard time
HUM	Harat ul-Mujahidin
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
JEL	Jamaat-e-Islami
JEM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JKIF	Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JKLF-Y	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front-Yasin Malik faction
JNLA	Jammu e Kashmir National Liberation Army
JSLF	Jammu e Kashmir Students Liberation Front
JUM	Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen
KCP	Kangleipak Communist Party
KYKL	Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup
KJF	Kashmir Jehad Force
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LAP	Local Armed Police
LDP	Laser Designation Pod
LEJ	Lashkar-e-Jabbar
LEO	Lashkar-e-Omar
LET	Lashkar-e-Toiba
LoC	Line of Control
LUM	Ikhwan-ul-Mujahideen
MANPADs	Man-Portable Air Defence System
MARCOS	Marine Commandos
MiG	Mikoyan i Gurevich
MI	Military Intelligence (India)
MJC	Mutahida Jehad Council
MJF	Muslim Janbaz Force
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDFB[S]	National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit)
NLI	Northern Light Infantry (Pakistan)

NTRO	National Technical Research Organization
NSA	National Security Advisor
NESCOM	National Engineering and Science Commission (Pakistan)
NEZ	No Escape Zone
NSCN[K]	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland [Khaplang]
NSG	National Security Guard
OC	Officer in Command
PAF	Pakistan Air Force
Para (SF)	Paratroop Regiment (Special Forces)
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
POK	Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
POW	Prisoner of War
PRPK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
QRT	Quick Reaction Team
R&AW	Research and Analysis Wing (India)
RCP	Riot Control Police
REK	Range Extension Kit
RPF	Railway Protection Force
RR	Rasthtriya Rifles (India)
SAG	Special Action Group
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAS	Special Air Service
SCG	Special Composite Group
SFF	Special Frontier Force (India)
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SOW	Stand-Off Weapon
Sqn	Squadron
SRG	Special Ranger Group
SRP	State Reserve Police
SSG	Special Services Group (Pakistan)
TEHK	Tehrik-e-Hirriat-e-Kashmir
TEJ	Tehrik-e-Jehad
TEJI	Tehrik-e-Jehad-e-Islami
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
TUM	Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UJC	United Jehad Council
ULFA-I	United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent
UN	United Nations
UNFLW	United National Liberation Front of West South East Asia
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UT	Union Territory
WVR	Within Visual Range

1

PARTITION TO PARAKRAM

To call the relationship between India and Pakistan of the early 21st Century 'fraught', would be an understatement. Much of this was attributed to religious differences – India being 78–80 percent Hindu and Pakistan being well over 95 percent Muslim – and to differences over the 'ownership' of the Kashmir region. However, this was not only simplistic: it was almost entirely wrong; indeed, insulting to the huge Indian-Muslim population, which has been steadfastly loyal to the Indian Republic and its secular Constitution (despite occasional concerns over the attitude of ruling political parties), and thus, an integral part of India's society.

The issue of Kashmir was always more complex. It was certainly the purported cause as espoused by the Pakistani leadership and, in particular, its military and intelligence agencies, for the continuing tensions between the two countries. There is also little doubt that since 1990, the region has been the scene of significant internal security challenges for India, which has responded with harsh but largely effective, counter-insurgency measures where, at great civilian cost, the insurgency has largely been contained. It is equally true that there was (and remains), a strong communal angle to the Kashmir situation, as it was (in 2019 it became a Union Territory), the only Muslim majority State in India.

However, more recently, under the guise of its support for Kashmiri 'self-determination', Pakistan has developed, funded, equipped and trained a vast network of terrorists inspired by Wahhabist theology: numerous organisations and leaders ended up on the lists of internationally-recognised terrorist organisations. The campaigns run by Pakistan against India with help of such groups had less to do with Kashmir – which, after 70 years of Pakistani efforts remained precisely where the boundaries fell in 1948 – but about de-stabilising India and ensuring the military-intelligence-oligarch-nexus that controlled (and still controls) Pakistan to justify its continued grip on power.

Since 2008, however, there has been an evolution in India's response to terror attacks found to have emanated from Pakistan. Usually reluctant to escalate militarily, unsuccessfully trying do so in 2001–2002 after the Indian Parliament was attacked by Pakistan-backed terrorists, India failed to retaliate after the 2008 Mumbai attacks. This led to much rethinking and following the Uri attacks of 2016, India exercised a limited military option through a raid by Special Forces. A 2019 attack in Pulwama, however, made India cross a threshold and involved the use of air power.

These three incidents and India's reaction to them, will be used to illustrate and analyse India's shifting response to terrorist attacks. These responses have not been without problems and challenges but the shift in approach is noteworthy. It is of interest, that from the date of India's last such operation to date, there has not been a single major terrorist attack on an Indian civilian target.

That all said, this book is not about Indian military and security operations in Kashmir, the rights or wrongs of the dispute between India and Pakistan, nor about the nuances between insurgencies and terrorism and the responses thereto: it is a matter of fact that the attacks discussed in this book were perpetrated by internationally-recognised terrorist organisations and thus they will be so designated.

India-Pakistan Conflicts 1948 to 2001

In 1947, the entity that was once British India was released into independence, accompanied by a brutal and bloody partition into two states. The ghosts of this single event continue to haunt the subcontinent to the present day as the bloodshed, bitterness and anger that it left behind has not been addressed through any attempt at reconciliation and recognition of the resulting suffering, trauma, and lasting damage.

With the British capitulating to the extremists, the former British Indian Empire was divided into India and Pakistan – with the latter created on the behest of some elements from the Muslim community and in particular, its leadership under Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In turn, Pakistan was divided into East and West Pakistan, separated by over 1,000 miles of India in-between. In both parts of Pakistan, there were substantial minorities – Hindus and Sikhs in West Pakistan, and Hindus in East Pakistan. They were not consulted nor protected during partition and with tensions high, things cascaded into a nightmarish situation.

Partition was accompanied by bloody communal riots which saw roughly one million killed and massive migrations, as some Muslims moved to Pakistan whilst the overwhelming majority of Hindus and Sikhs located in territory allocated to Pakistan, moved to India. Ever since, what was left of the Hindu and Sikh populations in Pakistan have steadily declined – even in erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh – with pressure to convert, forcible abductions and open intimidation of religious minorities being ever present. In India, unfortunately, the legacy of partition has been a level of unwarranted distrust of the Muslim population which, while large and increasing, has fallen behind in key educational parameters, thus creating a problem regarding employability. Moreover, the rise of Hindu nationalism as a viable political force in India has created additional tensions and uncertainty, although the Constitution of India provides protection against discrimination and has upheld the rights of minorities whenever any challenge arose.

States ruled by royal families were given an option to join India or Pakistan though some tried to become independent. The princely states of Hyderabad and Jundagh were absorbed into India in 1948 after some armed confrontation. However, the biggest problem came with respect to princely state of Jammu and Kashmir where a majority Muslim population lived under a Hindu ruler. In this state, the territories of Gilgit and Baltistan fell without a shot being fired when a garrison of Kashmiri troops, under British officers, unilaterally declared allegiance to Pakistan and presented the Maharaja with a fait accompli.

The 1948 Kashmir War[1]

A carefully orchestrated military operation which saw Pakistani supported tribesmen stage an invasion, led to the collapse of the

The First Indian Troops arrive in Srinagar. You can see a military truck and a C-47 military transport plane in the background. (Indian Army)

An Indian Daimler armored car travels through URi. Developed in the United Kingdom, the mission of this vehicle was to carry out patrols on the highways of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. (Indian Army)

Indian Air Force Hawker Tempest being prepared for a ground attack sortie. This single-seat fighter-bomber was also used by the Pakistani Air Force. (Indian Air Force)

Kashmiri State forces and several instances where Muslim soldiers mutinied and killed their Hindu comrades. Faced with this situation, Maharaja Hari Singh signed an instrument of accession to India.

In 1948, the first Kashmir War was fought between the Indian troops and Pakistani Pathans invading from the northwest of the Kashmir region. The conflict ended with an Indian appeal to the UN which led to a ceasefire. India held some two thirds of the state with the rest in Pakistani hands. There was also a mutual agreement to a formation of a Line of Control (LoC), a cease fire line to which the troops of both nations were withdrawn within a short period of time.

However, the LoC had a number of problems, not the least of which was the fact that the borders of the northernmost regions of Kashmir, especially in the Ladakh area, were poorly demarcated, any available maps were poorly drawn, and with the division of the territory between Indian and Pakistan, there were additional issues with respect to the uninhabited regions near the Karakoram range and the Shaksgam valley. With no presence of people in either these areas or the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh, the situation was complicated, with China occupying Aksai Chin and building infrastructure in the area.

Whilst the LoC was quite viable, the plans for a plebiscite fell apart. The plebiscite had a number of pre-conditions which formed part of the UN Resolution 47, dated 21 April 1948.[2] This recommended a non-binding formula aimed at resolving the dispute. Noteworthy in the aforesaid resolution is that the Government of Pakistan should undertake to use its best endeavours:

> (a) To secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani Nationals not normally resident therein, who have entered the State for the purposes of fighting and to prevent any intrusion into the State of such elements and any furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State.[3]

The presence of Indian troops was to be reduced to a minimum – but they were not to be completely withdrawn.

Pakistan has never withdrawn any troops or citizens from the area concerned. Moreover, the original territorial entity of Jammu and Kashmir no longer exists because:

- Pakistan has ceded land to China in the Shaksgam Valley in the state per the 1963 Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement;
- The Askai Chin region has been occupied by China since the 1950s and following the 1962 war between India and China, this territory has remained under Chinese control.

India's disastrous 1962 war with China resulted in the 'Line of Actual Control' that is not properly demarcated or agreed in parts of Ladakh. In 2020, Chinese transgressions in this area led to clashes and casualties on both sides with a tense armed stand-off being in force to date.

The 1965 War[4]

Whilst India subsequently followed a non-aligned foreign policy, Pakistan became allied to the United States of America (USA) and thus, joined the Baghdad Pact, the Central Treaty Organisation, the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation and signed a mutual defence agreement with the USA in 1954. This led to a rise in Pakistan's military and diplomatic influence in Washington as well as an influx of US arms.

Over the following years, India and Pakistan fought two major wars: in August 1965, Pakistan infiltrated close to 30,000 troops into the State of Kashmir. This effort was met with Indian military counteroffensive and escalated into a general war that saw the

Weapons captured from Pakistani Infiltrators. The standard armament for infiltrator missions was usually a rifle and a radio communicator. (Indian Army).

An Indian Army Centurion Mk.5 Main Battle Tank seen here at the 26 January 2022 Republic Day Parade on a tank transporter. The Centurion was phased out of Indian service in 1974. Photo Credit (PIB)

Captured Pakistani Infiltrators being searched by an Indian soldier. (Indian Army)

first large-scale use of air power and armour on the subcontinent. Although it ended in a strategic stalemate, the experience gained by armed forces of both sides was used to effect in subsequent conflicts.

It should be noted that the Kashmir War of 1965 was the last occasion in which Pakistan attempted to use force to wrestle control of Kashmir from India. Coming as it did after India's defeat in the war with China of 1962, this probably represented Pakistan's best chance of doing so.[5]

The UN brokered a ceasefire and in 1966, India and Pakistan signed an agreement in Tashkent (in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; a.k.a. USSR, also 'Soviet Union'), to resolve their issues in a peaceful manner. However, the Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri died shortly after and thus, the Tashkent Declaration proved ill-fated: it was to have virtually no long-term effect. The only of its points that was realised, was the insistence on the observance of the 1948 Cease Fire Line:

> The Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan have agreed that all armed personnel of the two countries shall be withdrawn not later than 25 February 1966, to the positions they held prior to 5 August 1965, and both sides shall observe the ceasefire terms on the ceasefire line.[6]

That said, as will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter – but alluded to herein – the LoC in the area leading to the Karakoram Range and the Siachen Glacier, remained improperly demarcated.

1971 India-Pakistan War[7]

Tensions between the two countries continued to flare up and – following internal tensions that degenerated into the systematic repression and the mass killing of people in what used to be East Pakistan – the two countries went to war with each other once again. After India supported an armed insurrection in East Pakistan, on 22 November 1971 an armoured clash provoked an air battle. In turn, (West) Pakistan then launched a pre-emptive strike on Indian air bases in the west. In the course of the general war, the Indian armed forces defeated the Pakistani Army and Air Force in the east, enabling the creation of the independent country of Bangladesh.

Simultaneously, Pakistan's attempts to relieve the pressure by attacking India in the west were thwarted and sizeable parts of the country occupied by the Indian Army. However, and despite numerous suggestions to the contrary, India had no intention of destroying Pakistan in that conflict. Instead, it sought to deliver only enough blows to shatter the myth about the invincibility of the Pakistani Armed Forces, carefully cultivated before and after.

The 1971 India-Pakistan War thus marked an important psychological blow to the morale and prestige of Pakistan and its armed forces. The resulting dismemberment of the country and the armed forces' abject failure to prevent it, led to a deep resolve among many in Pakistan's military and intelligence elites, to repay India in kind. That they have not been successful to date, despite making

Captured Pakistani M47 and M48 tanks being inspected. Both models carried the name "Patton" in honour of the famous American general who served in the Second World War. (Indian Army)

huge efforts to that end, has not caused any rethink in an ultimately, self-destructive approach to relations with India.

The conflict directly led to the Shimla Declaration of 1972 which aimed at settling all disputes bilaterally. This agreement, signed between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan had three particularly noteworthy elements: [8]

- A mutual commitment to the peaceful resolution of all issues through direct bilateral approaches.
- To build the foundations of a cooperative relationship with special focus on people to people contacts.
- To uphold the inviolability of the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir, which is a most important CBM between India and Pakistan and a key to durable peace.

This latter point has been critical to India's approach to the Kashmir dispute. India believes that the LoC is to be respected whilst, as Kargil 1999 showed, Pakistan has a rather different approach and has repudiated the Shimla Accords in most ways, not the least of which is its continued approach to treat the LoC as a boundary to be violated, as needed to pursue its own interests. India, on the other hand, is prepared to defend the LoC as much an international border.

The Shimla Accord represented the last, and undoubtedly, best chance for peace between India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan's then civilian government was toppled shortly thereafter, with Prime Minister Bhutto being hanged. The bitterness of defeat, the quest for a cause to justify its power and India's own mistakes internally, led, in 1987, to reap some measure of revenge in stirring up an insurgency of its own in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and to some extent, Punjab.

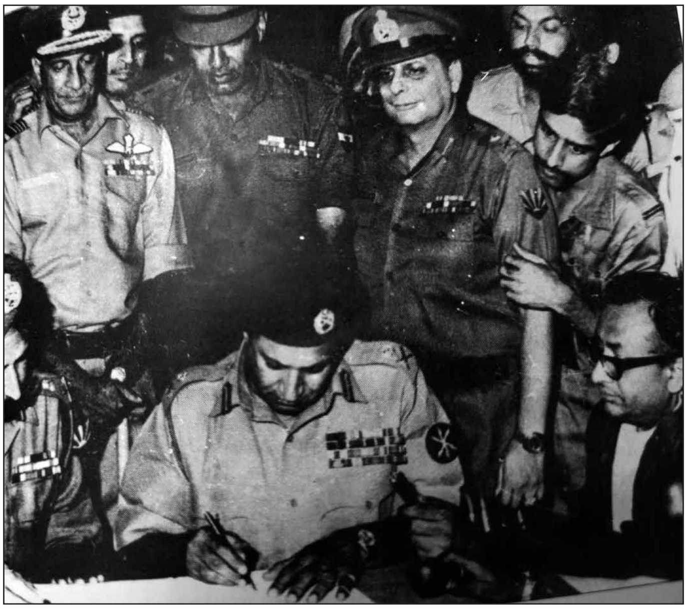
However, before this, India staged an audacious move that has left a lasting degree of humiliation in Pakistan, and in particular, the Pakistan Army. This involved the operation that has led to the longest running conflict between India and Pakistan – 1984 to the present day – with brigade sized formations facing off against each other on the world's highest battlefield where the environment and weather are greater danger than combat.

Captured Pakistani T-59 tank. This Chinese-made vehicle is a copy of the Soviet T-54 tank. (MoD)

Operation Meghdoot – Pakistan is Outfoxed

In the aftermath of the 1971 war, and perhaps still smarting from its defeat, Pakistan made some initial attempts to establish 'cartographic control' of the Siachen Glacier, attempting to join the last point on the LoC (Point NJ 9842) to the Karakoram Pass, a cartographic line moving north-eastwards. This, to India's thinking, was at odds with the terms of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India in October 1947 and the Karachi Agreement of 1949 which

Pakistani troops surrender their weapons in Dhaka. In 1947, after the end of British rule, the city became the administrative capital of East Pakistanand then the capital of Bangladesh (independent) after the 1971 war. (MoD)



Lt-Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, the Commander of Pakistani Eastern Command., signing the documented Instrument of Surrender in Dacca in the presence of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora (GOC-in-C of Indian Eastern Command.). Surojit Sen of All India Radio is seen holding a microphone on the right. (PIB)

described the ceasefire line (now the LoC) beyond Point NJ 9842 (which is the Saltoro Ridge and beyond) to be running northwards (as against north-eastwards) to the glaciers.[9]

Pakistan, whether inadvertently or by design, threw down the gauntlet that led to the Siachen conflict when in 1975, a German expedition wanted to go rafting on the Indus River in Ladakh. To facilitate the expedition, an Indian Army mountaineer, the legendary Colonel Narinder Kumar (nicknamed 'Bull'), obtained maps of the region from a number of sources and realised that Pakistan had cartographically claimed the Siachen Glacier and made cartographic alterations to the map of the Karakoram range. This set in motion a sequence of events that led to India staging one of its most audacious and bold military operations in 1984.

Colonel Kumar's accounts of events in 1975 indicates that the two Germans who wanted to go rafting were keen to be the first to perform such a feat on the Indus. The then Chief Minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir – Sheikh Abdullah – asked Colonel Kumar to assist the German team who were then duly introduced to the Colonel.

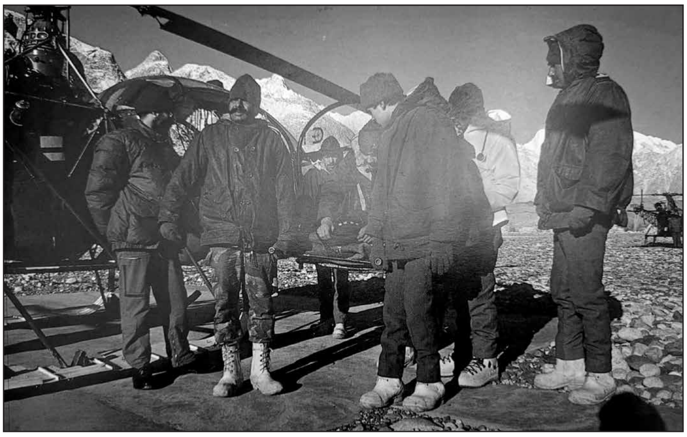
As Sheikh Abdullah was keen to facilitate the success of the first rafting expedition along the Indus, he cleared all the necessary permits in an expedited manner – the norm being clearances for any foreigners was required from the Army as well as the Home Department of Jammu and Kashmir, with the latter issuing the necessary 'inner-line permit'.[10] The Germans had brought some American maps with them and as Colonel Kumar began examining the area between NJ 9842 and the Karakoram Pass, he noticed: 'Those maps, to my surprise, had shown the ceasefire line (LoC now) being extended to the Karakoram Pass … I instantly realised that there was something wrong'.[11] He realised, before anyone else in India, that effectively Pakistan was claiming the Siachen Glacier.[12]

After persuading the Germans to leave their maps behind and paying a substantial sum for them, Colonel Kumar went to India's Director of Military Operations (DMO), Lieutenant General M.L. Chibber who, thinking to dismiss him, sent him to Brigadier Mehta, one of the Deputy Director Generals in the Operations Directorate. Colonel Kumar used his powers of persuasion to convince Brigadier Mehta to refer to historical treaties from the era of Ranjit Singh, as well as the more recent Shimla Accord. After examining the maps with reference to these treaties, Mehta was convinced that Colonel Kumar was correct.[13]

The two of them then approached Lieutenant General Chibber with the ominous news that there were issues with the new American maps and there were major security implications for India. With reality dawning on them, Lieutenant General Chibber was immediately concerned that India had no information as to what Pakistan had been doing in the region since 1963 – when they ceded territory to China. To this end, he approached the Chief of Army Staff, General T.N. Raina, to sanction an expedition in 1978, led by Colonel Kumar, under the guise of it being an operational patrol to enable the army to provide logistical support to the Colonel and his team.[14]

In August 1982, India began to make preliminary plans for a possible deployment of military forces to the Siachen Glacier. This initially took the form of intensified training at the High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS). This began (perhaps drawing inspiration from Colonel Kumar and his daring expeditions) with a series of operations to another high altitude mountain range at the other end of India – the Gorichen peak of Arunachal Pradesh, the highest peak in Eastern India, situated between the Tawang and West Kameng districts of that state. This peak is some 6,488 metres (22,500 feet) in height.[15] Arunachal Pradesh is ostensibly claimed by China but India has fully incorporated the region, stationing a garrison there.[16]

The 19 Battalion of the Kumaon regiment was assigned to 5 Mountain Division in 1982. This unit had been responsible for the defence of the Kameng Frontier Division of Arunachal Pradesh since the war between India and China in 1962. The formation was experienced, familiar with its terrain and area of responsibility. However, Major General Sami Khan, the GOC of 5 Mountain Division, was keen that the Gorichen peak, being the highest peak



MEDEVAC via a Cheetah helicopter. Despite its longevity and being loved by its crew, this helicopter was involved in a series of accidents. (MoD)

of the highest range of mountains in his area of responsibility, be conquered by troops from his Division and to this end, he went on an expedition to Gorichen.[17]

The Gorichen Expedition Team was able to gradually move to higher elevations and on 26 September, established its final base camp at an elevation of 5,000 metres (16,404 feet) to prepare for the final onslaught on Gorichen. Not taking any changes, the team spent much effort in honing ice-craft skills and further improving acclimatisation. This enabled the team to scale Gorichen peak on 6 October 1982, from two assault camps nearer the summit. This effort marked an important step, albeit at the time unknown, towards preparing for the capability to scale the Siachen Glacier and station troops.[18]

In the summer of 1983, India decided that it needed to keep a closer watch on the Siachen Glacier. Two patrols – Polar Bear 1 and Polar Bear 2 – were sent between June and September 1983. Polar Bear 2 was authorised to build a small shelter and a hut was constructed to protect the patrol from the strong winds prevalent on the glacier. Although the patrols were noticed by Pakistani helicopters which duly 'buzzed' them, there was no physical action taken by Pakistan to assert any level of control or to stop the Indian patrols on the Siachen Glacier. The Polar Bear 2 patrol returned to its base by the end of September 1983.[19]

Although Northern Command was pleased with the efforts of the two patrols, it quickly became apparent that Pakistan was not happy. Their Northern Sector Commander sent two strongly worded notes that were an ominous portent of things to come.[20]

Whilst intrusions and protest notes were common in the disputed areas of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, it was becoming evident to India that this was not a situation that could be readily solved by the normal counter-protests. The Indian Army decided to continue its patrols and as mentioned before, the Polar Bear 2 patrol took place in September 1983, after the Pakistani protests notes were duly received and responded to in the usual manner.

However, to India's Northern Command, it was becoming clear that Pakistan's claim over the Siachen Glacier was more serious than the normal claim and counter-claim. To this end, the Indian Army began a detailed evaluation of the situation of the Siachen situation and the concerns of a possible Pakistani attack on the glacier. This fear was reinforced by the reports that Pakistan was sending more civilian expeditions to the area and that the Pakistani Army was moving to procure a substantial quantity of high altitude warfare clothing and other equipment necessary for operations in extreme cold weather conditions and heavy snow cover.

Hindsight is often correct but it might be argued that a combination of factors – intelligence from RAW, the Indian Army's own assessments, plus the tone of Pakistan's August 1983 protest notes, gave India the strong impression that Pakistan was planning a military operation on the Siachen Glacier in the very short term. Planning commenced for the launch of an Indian operation to pre-empt any such Pakistani move on the glacier. Very comprehensive preparations began in September 1983 after the Polar Bear 2 patrol returned from the Siachen Glacier.[21]

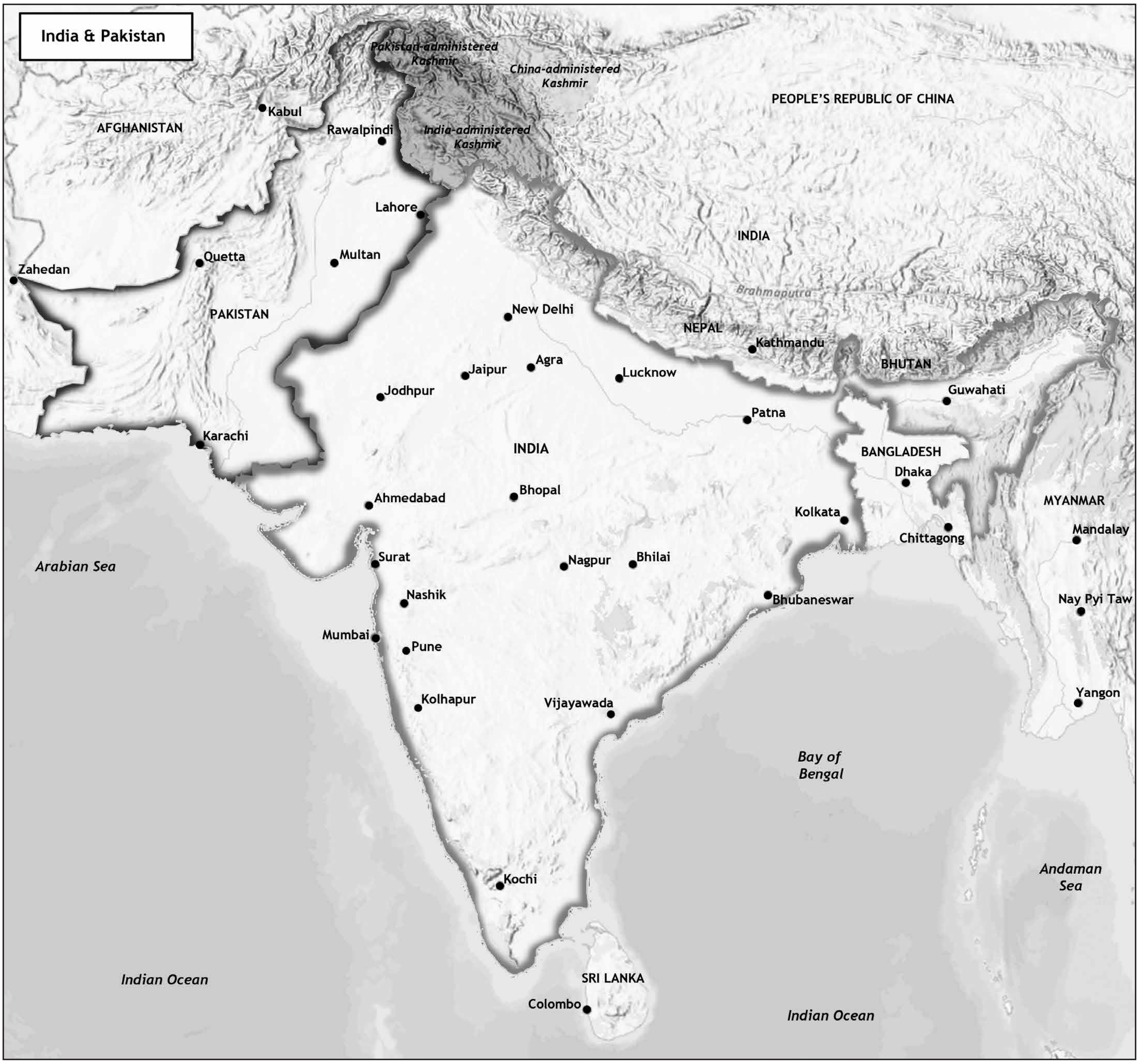
India's arrangements for its assault on the Siachen Glacier were made in earnest in January 1984. The Indian Army Northern Command, in particular its 15 Corps, were working towards preparing assault teams to reach the Saltoro Ridge, the watershed west of the Siachen Glacier. There was an emphasis on occupying Indira Col, Sia La and Bilafond La, which were the most prominent passes on the Saltoro Ridge as soon as possible. Once the planning was in progress, Lieutenant General Chibber wrote to the Chief of Army Staff, General A.S. Vaidya, in January 1984 to seek formal approval for the operations.[22]

As part of the planning, 79 Brigade Group which was part of 15 Corps, was to be designated as the 'Himalayan Brigade' for operations in extreme snow conditions. The plan was for this force to be equipped to a very high standard with specialised high altitude and cold weather gear plus special ski equipment.[23] It was proposed that this brigade group was to be equipped to the same standard as the assault force that would stage Operation Meghdoot. In the event, this did not happen in quite the way envisaged and 102 Infantry Brigade was selected instead.[24]

Lieutenant General Chibber's written communication was followed by detailed discussions with General Vaidya, as well as the Director General of Military Operations, Lieutenant General A.S. Somanna, on 9 February 1984. Five days later, full planning for Operation Meghdoot began in earnest. This included determining which formations were to be deployed, identifying the officers to lead the assault, as well as the supporting formations to be employed to assist and to be ready to reinforce the initial units deployed to seize and secure the Siachen Glacier and the Saltoro Ridge. The major decisions regarding these key issues were taken on 14 February.25

Northern Command assigned one company plus one platoon of the Ladakh Scouts; a formation recruited from the people of Ladakh. This was initially, a paramilitary force assigned to work with the Indian Army following the war with China, to be part of supporting the assault. The Ladakh Scouts were to emerge as a highly capable and decorated unit in conflicts post 1963 and became a full regiment of the Indian Army in 1999 after their stellar performance in the Kargil war. However, in 1984 they were a small, capable unit that was to play an important role during operations. Other than this company plus one platoon of the Ladakh Scouts, the other unit assigned to supporting the assault on the Siachen Glacier was a single platoon of the 4 Kumaon.[26]

The Siachen task force was moved to Sasoma on 28 March 1984 and the Indian Air Force began to airlift stores and other supplies. Some 461 tonnes were airlifted between 19 March 1984 and August 1984. Infrastructure was prepared at the base camp with high altitude huts being constructed, as well as a helipad for Mi-8 helicopters. These would lift stores to the base camp and thereafter, Cheetahs would move stores from Sasoma to the Forward Logistics Base and from the base camp to the assault camp. The only shortcomings in the schedule was the snow-clothing for the assault teams for Bilafond La and Sia La.[27]


India & Pakistan
Pakistan-administered Kashmir
China-administered Kashmir
India-administered Kashmir
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
AFGHANISTAN
Kabul
Rawalpindi
Lahore
INDIA
Zahedan
Quetta
Multan
PAKISTAN
Brahmaputra
New Delhi
NEPAL
Kathmandu
BHUTAN
Agra
Jaipur
Lucknow
Guwahati
Jodhpur
Patna
Karachi
INDIA
BANGLADESH
Dhaka
MYANMAR
Bhopal
Ahmedabad
Kolkata
Mandalay
Chittagong
Arabian Sea
Surat
Nagpur
Bhilai
Nashik
Bhubaneswar
Nay Pyi Taw
Mumbai
Pune
Kolhapur
Vijayawada
Yangon
Bay of Bengal
Kochi
Andaman Sea
Indian Ocean
SRI LANKA
Colombo
Indian Ocean

The three wars fought in 1948, 1965, and 1971, the Indian attack on the Siachen Glacier of 1984, and the Pakistani decision to 'cede' part of Kashmir to the People's Republic of China resulted in this map of India and Pakistan. Except for the Kahsmir issue, it should be kept in mind that large segments of the border between India and the People's Republic of China remain a matter of dispute. (Map by Tom Cooper)

The supporting force comprising 19 Kumaon, began to move on 18 March 1984. The full strength of the battalion, 14 officers, 20 junior commissioned officers and 473 other ranks, after a prayer at the Mandir of the units patron Goddess – Kalika Mata – began its 630km trek to the Siachen Glacier in its unit transport. It was augmented by at least one three ton truck which was there to move the additional supplies needed for the battalion's part in the Siachen operations from its base in Khrew to Siachen.[28]

One other detachment of 19 Kumaon, was dispatched by air as an advance party. This group, of roughly platoon strength, was led by Captain Ajit Samuel and additionally, comprised 4 Junior Commissioned Officers and 24 Other Ranks. This detachment was tasked to proceed via transport aircraft – rather surprisingly a C-119 Packet of the IAF – to Leh and on the same day that the rest of the battalion began its road trek from Khrew. This combination of road and air transport enabled the battalion to get into position in a relatively short period of time given the environment.[29] The fact that a full battalion, its support equipment, plus adequate supplies was able to accomplish this feat in a modest time frame, in extremely hostile weather conditions – both cold and extreme snow – is testimony to sound planning but also determination and initiative.

On 30 March 1984, 19 Kumaon concentrated at the Leh Transit camp for its onward push. Attempts were made by two companies under Major S.C. Thakur, to cross Khardung La. However, the road was closed and the parties had to return to Leh.[30]

As a fully operational unit, the battalion brought with it all its support equipment, including its mortar platoon under the command of Captain Samir Ganguly. As the operation depended heavily on the determination and capabilities of junior officers, this platoon was to prove to be decisive in ensuring that the 19 Kumaon was able to meet its objectives and get to Sasoma by 18 April 1984.[31]

Brigadier Channa selected Captain Sanjay Kulkarni to lead a platoon of 4 Kumaon to Bilafond La thus commencing Operation Meghdoot. Major A.N. Bahuguna was tasked with leading the

Indian Army Strela-2M MANPAD operator in Siachen. The Strela is one of the most successful anti-aircraft missiles on the battlefield, being used in more than twenty conflicts. (Indian Army)

Ladakh Scouts in platoon strength to take Sia La. As with 19 Kumaon, these troops began to concentrate at Sasoma. On 11 April 1984, 19 Kumaon, concentrated at Leh and a special ski troop force was assembled, comprising five officers, six JCOs and 43 other ranks from HAWS. This attachment of HAWS personnel enabled the team to overcome any difficulties involved in crossing a snow-bound landscape and was to be invaluable.[32]

Given the numbers of troops involved, helicopter support was adequate but not generous. For medium lift operations, two Mi-8 helicopters, under the command of Wing Commander K.K. Sangar, were positioned at Thoise, while a larger force of six smaller Cheetah helicopters, which were far better at high altitude operations, were placed under the command of Wing Commander G.S. Sandhu.

Weapons support was not altogether lavish and rather surprisingly, there was a heavy air defence component. Whilst limited artillery support was provided by four Grad-P single round rocket launchers – a single round launcher using 122mm rockets similar to those used by the Grad multi-barrel rocket launcher – a detachment of two Zu-23-2 guns from 126 Light AD Regiment (Composite) and three detachments of SA-7 Strela-2M man-portable SAMs from 502 AD Group, (SP) were positioned at the base camp.

Additional anti-aircraft artillery support was available (ZU-23-2 guns) from the rest of 126 Light AD Regiment and 127 Light AD Regiment (Composite).[33] In addition, 105 AD regiment, with radar directed 40mm Bofors L40/70 guns, was inducted in September 1984 for the defence of base camp Siachen. This unit became the only AD unit with radar directed guns to cross the Khardung La pass at an altitude of 18,300 feet.[34] From these deployments, it is clear that India was concerned about the combination of Pakistani helicopter interference, plus the possibility of an air attack on its base camp and other vital areas and points in the Siachen theatre.

The Indian Army began to have discussions on a possible D-Day and H-Hour for the commencement of operations. Northern Command had set a timeframe of between 10 and 30 April 1984. As has been noted, 19 Kumaon was fully in position by early to mid-April 1984. The final date for operations was at the discretion of the Sector Commander, Brigadier Channa. He decided on the date of 13 April. Brigadier Channa's command style was viewed in some circles as unconventional and he used this in his planning and choice of a date for commencement. His choice was to be an inspired one.[35]

Weather conditions on 13 April 1984 were appalling with a snowstorm in progress. Yet at 0530 hrs on 13 April 1984, the first Cheetah helicopter sortie was launched, carrying Captain Sanjay Kulkarni of 4 Kumaon and one soldier. This was followed by two more helicopters in succession. By 1200 hrs, 17 sorties had been flown by Squadron Leader Surinder S. Bains and Rohit Rai and had managed to place Captain Kulkarni, one JCO and 27 other ranks at Bilafond La.

It was then that the weather took a devastating turn for the worse, placing at risk Captain Kulkarni and his surviving soldiers. While at Bilafond La, the weather turned bad, visibility fell to zero which had the effect of immediately grounding the fragile fleet of Cheetahs. Future sorties were thus ruled out.[36]

Yet, among all the confusion, inclement weather and despite the casualties already hurt by the environment, the Indian flag was planted on Bilafond La on 13 April 1984.

Even while Captain Kulkarni's team remained out of contact, the ground troops began their inexorable, arduous move on foot from the base camp and established Camp II on 13 April 1984. Along the route to Bilafond La, Camp II and Camp III were established by 15 April. Lieutenant Colonel Pushkar Chand, Task Force Commander moved the Ladakh Scouts and 19 Kumaon units to Camp I and thereafter to Camp II. Pushkar Chand, to maintain morale, contact and experience the terrain, walked to every post he established during his six-month duty tenure.[37]

After a three day period of great tension, the weather improved on 17 April 1984. The Indian Air Force prepared to conduct its operations and was able on that day to fly 32 helicopters using all available serviceable assets. Both Mi-8s were operational and pressed into service. However, only five of the six Cheetahs were available on that day but they too worked to reinforce and resupply the Bilafond La position with supplies, equipped and replacement personnel. This air lift was instrumental in those early days in securing India's precarious hold on this most important part of the Siachen Glacier.[38]

On that same day, Major Ajay Bahuguna and his platoon of Ladakh Scouts were able to reach and occupy Sia La. For this, the helicopters had to drop Major Bahuguna and his troops some 5km east of Sia La. To reach their objective, the Ladakh Scouts, even accustomed to the terrain of Ladakh which is inhospitable at best, had to scale difficult slopes and compounded by the very heavy snowfall over the preceding days, made movement a slow, deliberate and extremely dangerous affair. Yet, the Ladakh Scouts were able to meet their objective and arrive in good time.[39]

India speeded up construction of infrastructure and connectivity at this time. The Link Up force established the Forward Logistics Base in the basic area of the Siachen Glacier on 18 April and Camp IV on 22 April. The link up with Bilafond La post took place on 24 August. On the same day, Camp V was created. Following the creation of Camp VI on 26 April, the remaining Indian forces were divided into two parties. One party established the assault camp at Indira Col and Turkestan La on 29 April.

The other party, commanded by Major N. S. Salaria of the Ladakh Scouts was able to link up with the Sia La post on the same day.[40] This completed the initial stage of *Operation Meghdoot* which achieved its objectives in a spectacular fashion at relatively low cost.

The Siachen conflict and its attendant complications regarding both India-Pakistan and India-China relations have to be seen in the context of the competing claims, concerns and imperatives within the broader Kashmir region. Pakistan sees Kashmir as being unfinished business from partition and believes on a philosophical level, that the Muslim majority region should belong to Pakistan. Set against that is India's view that it intends never to allow another geographic split along religious lines and will do whatever is necessary to ensure its territorial integrity to the extent of combating any attempt at disruption and by whatever means necessary. Into this mix comes China, which has never accepted the old pre-Independence border with India and has been steadily trying to use its great political, economic and military muscle to push a geographical settlement on its terms.

India's conflict with Pakistan in Siachen, whilst closely linked to the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, has acquired a life of its own. India is looking at the conflict in much broader geopolitical terms with both its concerns over Pakistani encroachment in Ladakh and China's attempts to forge a geographical land-link with Pakistan through the Karakoram highway threatening India's positions in Ladakh.

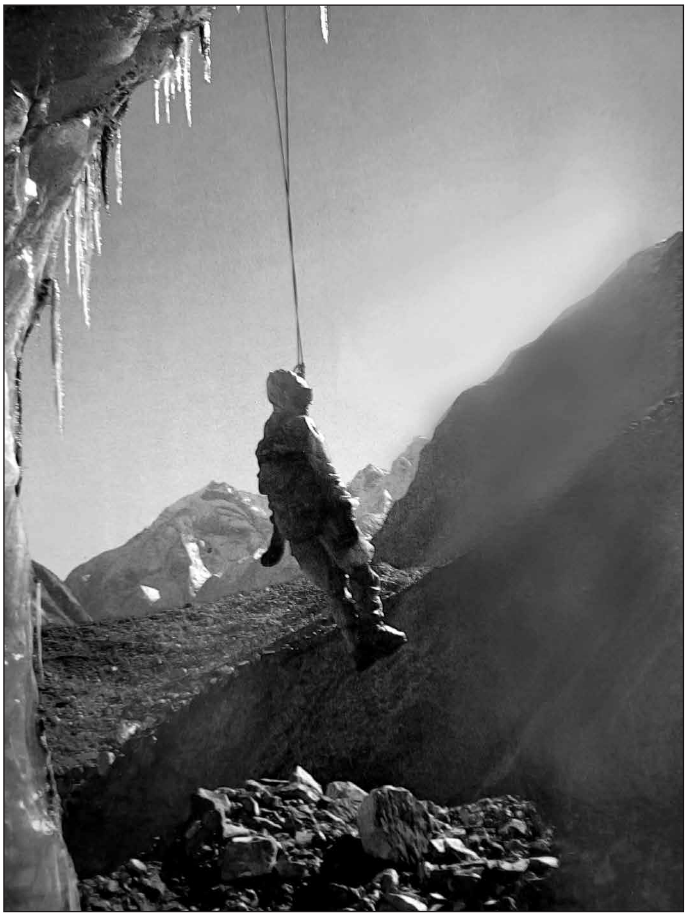
India's Security Situation in the 1980s

When Operation Meghdoot was launched in 1984, India was in a state of turmoil. This turmoil was to last for decades. Central to India's security is the fact that it is bordered by two countries with whom it has had serious border disputes. India has a volatile border with Pakistan and from 1983 to about 1993 had issues with a Pakistani sponsored insurgency in the Indian state of Punjab. There was also the beginnings of a dangerous insurgency in the disputed Kashmir region.

With China, the border dispute in 1988 was not nearly as serious, although there was and is, mutual distrust between the two. This has meant that a substantial Indian troop presence has been maintained along the Sino-Indian border since the two countries fought a short but vicious war in 1962. It is also where there was a major confrontation between the two during 1986 and 1987.

India's internal security issues were quite substantial throughout the 1980s with insurgencies springing up and intensifying throughout the country. From the northeast, with ongoing brutal ethnic violence taking place in Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and even Meghalaya and Tripura, to the Punjab. It was there the Indian Army was compelled in 1984, to storm the holiest of Sikh shrines – the Golden Temple in Amritsar, [41] to neutralise terrorists holed up therein. Along with the increasingly intense protests in Kashmir (later to emerge as an armed insurgency over rigged elections in 1987),[42] India's military was heavily committed to internal security operations. However, its forces were still quite able to focus on conventional warfare against its hostile and very capable neighbours.

The Prime Minister of India, from 1984 to 1989, was Rajiv Gandhi, the son of the previous Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi who was herself, the daughter of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Indira Gandhi was assassinated in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the assault on the Golden Temple. This led to a vicious pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi, aided by the governing Indian National Congress. Rajiv Gandhi won the 1984 elections in a landslide victory and proceeded to begin a haphazard, though well-intentioned, series of economic and military reforms and an expansion of the armed forces.


Casualty rescue of an Indian soldier in Siachen. (Indian Army)

India also faced tensions with China; following a prolonged and uneasy peace that began after India's defeat in the 1962 war, there was a sharp clash at Nathu La and Cho La in 1967 in which 88 Indians and over 300 Chinese soldiers were reported killed. In 1975, an incident led to the deaths of four Indian soldiers of the Assam Rifles in an ambush at Tulung La in Andhra Pradesh. In mid-1987, while the Siachen conflict was ongoing, Chinese and Indian forces were involved in a confrontation at the Sumdrong Chu Valley. This prompted the Chief of Army Staff, Krishnaswamy Sundarji, to obtain permission to hold Operation Chequerboard involving a substantial increase of 50,000 troops to the strength then present in Arunachal Pradesh. An exercise involving 10 divisions and several squadrons of the Indian Air Force was also held. Three divisions at Wangdung were sustained solely by air, thus demonstrating to China a capability to sustain forces in distant areas away from road links and which has proved to be very important for Indian units facing China ever since. The confrontation led to no combat between the countries.[43]

A potentially much more serious event took place between 1986 and 1987. In late 1986, India conducted a table-top exercise to explore new integrated mechanised warfare tactics. These evolved into a full-scale exercise – Operation Brasstacks – involving 150,000 men and thousands of tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery pieces and aircraft.[44] However, a series of miscommunications over this exercise led to a massing of forces along the Pakistani border. Islamabad was worried that New Delhi actually planned a major strike to bifurcate the country with help of rapidly advancing mechanised units. This apprehension did not result in a war but Pakistan was rattled by the new Indian strategy and inexorably moved towards nuclearisation. This had a direct bearing on the course of India's response or lack thereof.

Pakistan's support for Kashmiri insurgents also led to a confrontation in 1990 but this was on a smaller scale. Instead, between 1987 and 1990 both countries began the process of weaponising their hitherto, nascent nuclear capability. Indeed, the year 1990 perhaps marked the point when Pakistan deployed its first weapons. This entire process culminated in the nuclear tests of 1998 when both nations demonstrated their nuclear weapons capability in the most dramatic fashion.

However, as will be detailed in the next chapter, there was increasing tension over Pakistani support to insurgents, first in Punjab where links between Pakistan and a violent Sikh secessionist movement were established. This conflict lasted roughly 10 years and saw the deaths of thousands in terrorist attacks and vicious counter-terrorist operations, spearheaded by the Punjab Police. This period saw the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar and the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, followed by horrendous anti-Sikh pogroms.[45] Yet, despite the intensity of this conflict, the Punjab Police, overwhelmingly Sikh in composition, supported by the army and paramilitary forces, was eventually able to contain, nullify and destroy the Sikh terrorist forces. The movement for a Sikh ethno-state remains active in Western countries, in India it is a non-issue.

In addition, post 1987, an opportunity for Pakistani involvement was provided in Kashmir where rigged State assembly elections fuelled local resentment. Pakistani support to insurgents in Kashmir, led to India adopting an increasingly harsh line against Pakistan and pursuing a relentless counter-insurgency campaign. In 1990, the Kashmir issues came to a head when a vicious campaign against the Hindu Kashmiri Pandits of the Valley of Kashmir took place. Virtually the entire population of Pandits was cleared with several being brutally murdered. Many Muslims in the valley were complicit in this expulsion which rankles to this day. India's response was sharp and brutal with police and central police forces (these include the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) among others) using excessive force to deal with protests while conducting harsh counter-insurgency operations.

India's response to increasing separatist violence, terrorist attacks and Pakistani jihadi infiltration between 1987–1993 was intense, brutal and at times, excessive. However, despite acknowledged human rights violations on all sides, the status quo has remained unchanged, with India being completely unmoved by criticism for its position on Kashmir and with Pakistan unrelenting in its support for insurgents and terrorists operating with impunity from its territory.[46]

Kargil 1999

In 1999, very indirectly, the Siachen conflict played a part in the bloody 1999 war between India and Pakistan in the Kargil region of Ladakh. This war was intense, widely-covered in the media and still provokes strong feelings.

From an Indian perspective, the Kargil conflict brought out serious shortcomings in India's national security apparatus, caused much internal debate and ultimately, led to an expert panel review of the Kargil conflict and the failures which allowed the Pakistani incursion to occur. The report produced by the Kargil Review Committee, was released and published in a redacted form and forms an important body of work on the subject of the war. It is unsparing in criticism, recommending major changes to the existing system, as well as crediting the ability of even the flawed Indian system, to respond effectively to a threat.

From a Pakistani perspective, it is rather unfortunate that even to date, there is a degree of reticence to acknowledge the extent of Pakistan's role in the conflict, the units of its armed forces involved, as well as the extent of their losses. It was only after a gap of 13 years that the names of some of the soldiers of the NLI were acknowledged to have fallen in combat during the Kargil conflict. Despite a few books on the subject, Pakistan has not taken full ownership of its responsibility for the conflict.

In 1998, India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons. This was followed by attempts to lower tensions through the so-called Lahore Declaration. However, shortly thereafter the Kargil War between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan might be deemed to have started on 3 May 1999 and ended on 26 July 1999, making it a relatively long conflict by the standards of the Indian subcontinent.

What began with an infiltration by the troops of the Northern Light Infantry Brigade of the Pakistani Army, supported by separatist 'Mujahideen' combatants into Indian controlled territory, saw the first use of air power by India since the 1971 India-Pakistan War and marked a turning point in relations between the two nations, increasing India's distrust of Pakistan and placing little faith in that country's civilian leadership, which was shortly thereafter toppled.

It is still unclear as to why Pakistan conceived its war plans for Kargil particularly as given the summit in February 1999, there was demonstrated a good deal of hope that the tensions between the two countries could be reduced. It might be speculated that Pakistan's army, which has demonstrated a long institutional memory, had sought to initiate Operation Badr in some way to carry out a degree of 'revenge' for India's 1984 Operation Meghdoot.

The Pakistani incursions were based upon exploitation of the gaps that exist in the defences in the sector both on Indian and Pakistani side of the LoC. These gaps are made possible by the geography as the terrain is extremely rugged. Very few tracks led from the main roads towards the LoC making transport and reinforcements difficult. The climate favoured the timing of the operation as during winter, the Kargil area receives very heavy snowfall making movement almost impossible. The only mountain pass connecting the Kargil area to the Kashmir Valley, Zoji La, does not usually open until the end of May or beginning of June. This made the movement of Indian reinforcements by road convoys from Srinagar, impossible.[47]

Pakistan's Kargil plan was put into action at the end of April 1999. Small sub-groups of platoon size were used to conduct multiple intrusion along the ridgelines and occupy heights dominating Indian positions. After it was finalised, the plan was put into action towards the end of April. The main units were broken into a number of smaller sub-groups of 30 to 40 troops, each to carry out multiple intrusions along the ridgelines and occupy dominating heights.[48]

The forces earmarked were a mixture of highly professional soldiers and Islamist combatants. Units involved included the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 12th battalions of the Pakistani Army's Northern Light Infantry (NLI). The NLI being an old and capable formation with a pedigree going back to the 1950s. The headquarters of 62 Brigade of the Pakistani Army was made responsible administratively for all operations in the Kargil Sector and was also responsible for organising, supporting and where possible, assisting the infiltration.

Following the end of heavy snowfalls, NLI soldiers crossed the LoC in large numbers in Mushko Valley, Dras, Kaksar and Batalik

Indian 155mm FH-77B02 in action in Kargil. Developed in Sweden, this howitzer uses standard NATO ammunition and has an effective range of 24km. (MoD)

Indian Riflemen engage Pakistani troops in Kargil. Note the large amount of 84mm Carl Gustav ammunition. (MoD)

subsectors and established positions on top of high mountain ridgelines. To fortify their positions, the intruders set about building bunkers and sangars and brought forward their heavy weapons which included mortars, heavy and light machine guns, as well as shoulder-fired Stinger missiles. In addition, storage dumps of ammunition, rations and other stores were established and a large number of anti-personnel mines were laid.[49]

Initial Indian Army Patrols conducting routine surveillance, detected intruders atop Kargil ridges during the period 8–15 May 1999. Quite early on, the infiltration pattern suggested the participation of regular Pakistani troops, as well as that of the Islamist militants. The scale of the infiltration was initially underestimated but it soon became clear that India was facing a major military incursion.

During the course of the Kargil operations, numerous infantry battalions rotated through different brigades, attached and detached as needed. For example, the Brigade of the Guards provided additional detachments with Milan ATGMs which were used in the direct fire mode. Special Forces Units as well as India's counter-insurgency force, the Rashtriya Rifles, were also participants in the Kargil operations. The Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force – Central Armed Police Forces – supported the army and helped preserve the integrity of the counter-insurgency grid that is critical to internal security in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.[50]

No fewer than 19 artillery regiments participated in the war. They were attached to the artillery brigades of the respective division, XV Corps artillery, as well as independent units assigned to fire support. Field Regiments were equipped with 105mm Indian Field Guns or Light Field Guns, medium regiments were equipped with 130mm M-46 guns and 155mm FH-77/B-02 Bofors howitzers. Light regiments operated 120mm mortars whilst the sole heavy mortar regiment deployed fielded Tampella 160mm mortars. Some 75/24mm Indian designed pack howitzers were used in the direct fire role, whilst a rocket regiment with BM-21 122mm rockets was also deployed.

The deployment of artillery was lavish by Indian standards with some three to four hundred artillery pieces and mortars in action to support Indian operations. This in turn, placed a significant strain on India's ability to keep guns supplied with ammunition and spare parts. The use of older weapons was slowly discouraged with the 75/24mm gun being one which might have been deemed suitable for use in mountains: however, its short range and light shell were less than effective. This also applied, albeit to a lesser extent, to the 105mm field guns which were given less priority than larger calibre weapons.

The artillery units were supported by two Reconnaissance and Observation squadrons (663 and 668) of the Army Aviation Corps, both equipped with HAL Cheetah (licence built Aérospatiale SE.315 Alouette II). These helicopters, in the absence of UAVs were to prove extremely valuable to the Indian Army. Not only did they provide excellent spotting for the artillery, but they also proved to be highly effective reconnaissance assets. Whilst the helicopters initially flew with no sensor arrays of any kind, the Indian Army did experiment with fitting the FLIR turret of the Nishant UAV to the Cheetah helicopter to dramatically improve its night and bad-weather surveillance capabilities. However, even with such equipment, the Cheetah remained a small and relatively vulnerable vehicle, and it is almost surprising that none was shot down.

The Indian Army's Corps of Air Defence Artillery also deployed units during the Kargil conflict with P-18 radars and the 326th Light Air Defence Regiment (Composite) being deployed to give active support to the Indian Army in the event of any Pakistani air threat. Being a composite regiment, the 326th operated a combination of 23mm towed ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft guns and Igla-1M missiles. These were assigned to defend artillery positions and to cover troop and munition-convoys moving into the theatre. Additional support was provided by the Bofors L/70 40mm guns of the 323rd Air Defence Regiment which provided cover for vital areas and points, and the 146th Light Air Defence Regiment (Self-Propelled) which operated ZU-23-2 guns on a 6x6 trucks.[51]

Indian military operations continued from 12 May for seven weeks as New Delhi accepted neither ceasefire requests nor any efforts towards conciliation or negotiations. On the contrary, despite significant difficulties, its armed forces moved inexorably towards evicting the intruders and were able to do so by 26 July 1999 after a series of operations which captured ridgeline after ridgeline, evicting and destroying Pakistani positions and compelling a withdrawal of Pakistani intruders.[52]

Indian losses during the Kargil campaign were heavy. These included 26 Officers, 21 JCOs and 452 from other ranks killed; 66 Officers, 60 JCOs and 1,085 from other ranks wounded plus four missing. A total Indian casualty count of 1,714 killed, wounded and missing.[53] Materially, the IAF also lost one MiG-21M, one MiG-27L and one Mi-17, five Indian aircrew being killed in the process.

Pakistani losses were somewhat less clear, primarily because it took years for official Islamabad to ever admit the involvement of its armed forces. The Indian military intelligence estimated them with a total of 772 killed (including 69 Officers and 76 SSG personnel), over 1,000 wounded and eight POWs. Troops in contact with the Pakistanis suggest 597 killed, whilst radio intercepts identified 591 killed. Prisoners included Naik Inayat Ali and Sepoys Hunar Shah, Sher Baz Khan and Mohammad Ayaz from 5 NLI; Sepoy Fazal Aman from 24 Sindh, Sepoys Abdul Hamid and Salik Khan from 33 Frontier Force Regiment and Sepoy Ashraf from 19 Frontier Force Regiment.[54] In addition, a number of diaries and identity documents were captured from Pakistani bodies which established the units from which many of the infiltrators originated. This undoubtedly, helped India's narrative that the incursion was the work of Pakistani regulars rather than merely Pakistani supported Mujahidin and this served to bolster India's efforts.

Pakistan never admitted to the casualties suffered and even now, only tangentially accepts that their troops were involved. Pervez Musharraf suggested 357 killed and 665 wounded; Nawaz Sharif's PML-N gives casualties of 3,000 Mujahidin, Officers and soldiers of the NLI 'rendering sacrifice'; whilst the Pakistan Army named 453 killed in the Batalik-Kargil sector in 1999.[55]

India's hold on Siachen and the audacity of Operation Meghdoot, at some level factored into Pakistan's planning for Operation Badr and the wider Kargil war. However, the Pakistanis, despite achieving complete surprise and securing the peaks of Kargil and being able to interdict India's supply lines, completely underestimated India's resolve. They did not reckon on its determination not to capitulate and its intention not to allow its supply lines to Siachen to be compromised or threatened in any way. In this regard, Pakistan found itself in an unwinnable situation and given India's willingness to sustain casualties in the process, inevitably lost the Kargil war.

Perhaps the final word on the Kargil conflict should be left to retired Lieutenant General Shahid Aziz, former Chief of General Staff of the Pakistan Army. 'It was a failure because we had to hide its objectives and results from our own people and the nation. It had no purpose, no planning and nobody knows even today how many soldiers lost their lives'.[56]

Operation Parakram

On 13 December 2001, a team of five terrorists belonging to the Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JEM) assaulted the Indian Parliament building. Though they were successfully foiled and failed to reach their primary targets, six unarmed police personnel, two unarmed Parliamentary security guards and one gardener were killed by the terrorists. All five of the latter were killed in the response by the Indian security forces. Though Parliament had been adjourned, over 100 Parliamentarians plus support staff, were in the building and in danger. Quick thinking on the part of Constable Kamlesh Kumari managed to close the gates, cutting off the attackers from their prime targets, Kumari being unfortunately, killed.

The violation at the centre of India's democracy provoked a high level of outrage and anger. Whilst the rest of the world was busy with the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 along with Pakistan being made an 'ally' in the War on Terror, India found itself in a quandary

Indian Police Officer engages terrorists during the Parliament attack. Six Delhi Police Personnel, two Parliament Security Persons and a gardener were killed in the attack. (PIB) as to how to react to this act of terror which was traced to Pakistan, despite the latter's protestations to the contrary. This was particularly galling because one month earlier, a similar terrorist attack was staged on the State Assembly building of the state of Jammu and Kashmir which housed its elected members. This attack was far more deadly and claimed some 38 lives before the terrorists were neutralised.

India responded to this attack with the biggest military mobilisation for many decades. The Indian Army's mechanised formations began moving from their holding areas to the border, troops were mobilised and ammunition reserves were bolstered and placed in a state of readiness. The Indian Air Force and Navy were fully deployed with spares, munitions, fuel and lubricants being stockpiled for action. The India armed forces, it seems were readying for a strike. However, the four weeks needed for India to mobilise, gave Pakistan ample opportunity to move its forces into defensive positions, making a short, sharp, decisive conflict extremely unlikely.

India and Pakistan, after some mediation, disengaged in 2002. However, the failure to punish Pakistan militarily for terrorist strikes rankled in

IAF Pechora SAM unit deployed during Operation Parakram. (PIB)

A Centurion tank on display at the Cavalary Tank Museum in Maharashtra, India. (Mohit S)

टैंक टी-72 एम 1 अजेय
TK T-72 M 1 AJEYA
23
A T-72 M1 tank belonging to the Indian army is seen at a Republic Day parade. The T-72 became famous for its participation in the Gulf War and the Ukrainian War. (Hemant.rawat1234)

India's collective psyche. It would be another 14 years before India would learn to use its military like a scalpel.

However, before India learnt how to use its forces, it had to contend with a coordinated Pakistani plan to exploit fault lines in India to create a number of insurgencies, most successfully in Kashmir, which continue to be active. That project, Operation Tupac, is ongoing and is, for all practical purposes, a proxy war waged by Pakistan against India.

2

OPERATION TUPAC AND PAKISTAN'S JIHAD FACTORY

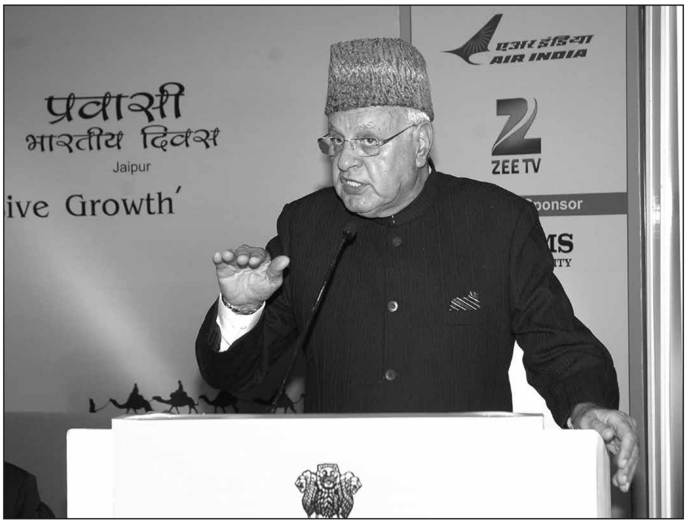
In 1965, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar which involved the infiltration of some 200 personnel, largely drawn from the Azad Kashmir Regular Forces and the Special Services Group (SSG) of the Pakistani armed forces. The objective of this group was to infiltrate into Indian Jammu and Kashmir and foment a local insurgency which would eventually force India out of the state. It was a spectacular failure with no insurgency forming and with a strong Indian counter-attack that defeated the infiltrated forces and rounded them up relatively quickly. India's willingness to escalate the conflict was also pivotal in ensuring that it failed.

Jammu and Kashmir's Muslim majority was restive – concentrated in Kashmir, with Jammu being more than 66 percent Hindu – and were kept less than fully integrated into India, thanks to Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution which gave the State a level of autonomy. However, it was not predisposed to taking up arms against India and there was little traction for the insurgency in the state. Moreover, the Indian government had given little cause for resentment in respect of local democracy and the respecting of local authorities. In addition, in 1965, Islamic radicalism had not yet reared its terrifying spectre.

Some 20 years later, things were rather different. Pakistan was, in its own mind, fresh from effectively defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan through a skilful use of supplied weapons, local resentment and Islamic radicalism. By 1988, the first steps towards a Pakistani nuclear deterrent were also in place to deter any Indian expansion of a potential conflict through conventional military means. Pakistan was replete with funding from its support to the mujahideen in Afghanistan and had huge stocks of small arms and explosives available for distribution through smuggling networks. More importantly, Islamic radicalism was now a viable ideological approach.

India's bungling ensured that a far more receptive audience would be available to Pakistani blandishments and incentives to revolt. The 1987 State Assembly elections were, quite blatantly, rigged by the ruling Indian National Congress of Rajiv Gandhi to ensure the victory of his ally Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference. The latter's rule was none too popular and the suppression of the Opposition, extensive electoral malpractice and the obviously rigged result, created much resentment. The subsequent crackdown on dissent by Abdullah and his ally Gandhi, opened the door to Pakistan's involvement in fomenting a much more effective Kashmiri insurgency. It is ironic that the politicians of Kashmir, who presided over the mess of 1987, remain active in local and national politics in India while the Central government has been compelled to clean up

A large number of M47 and M48 Patton tanks were captured by the Indian Army during the 1965 war. Many were later put on display. (Indian Army)



Dr. Farooq Abdullah addressing a seminar in Pravasi Bharatiya divas in 2012, Jaipur, in Rajasthan on 07 January 2012. (BMNRE of India)

decades of misgovernance and electoral malfeasance perpetrated by those politicians.[1]

Operation Tupac

In 1988, fresh from its 'victory' over the Soviets and still smarting from the bifurcation of Pakistan in 1971, the Pakistani ISI came up with the audacious and utterly amoral, Operation Tupac. It was named after the Peruvian revolutionary Tupac Amaru who led an Andean uprising against Spanish colonial rule in the period 1780 to 1783. In retrospect, the operation might have been better named the Andean revolt as it ended in utter defeat and additional restrictions on the rights of the Indigenous population. On the other hand, given what happened in 2019, it is possible that the name may be more apt than the Pakistanis realised. It should also be noted that an alternative of spelling 'Topac' means 'gun' in Pashto and true enough, Operation 'Topac' involved the liberal dissemination of firearms and explosives to terrorist groups in India who used them with murderous efficiency but to no political success.[2] There are serious doubts as to whether there is a formal Pakistani programme called 'Operation Tupac', given that it was also a fictional scenario drawn up by the Indian Defence Review journal in 1989. However, enough circumstantial evidence exists – especially in the way that things have unfolded over the decades – to suggest that whether or not so named, a Pakistani plan of some sort exists.[3]

The defeat of the Soviet Union, the abundance of arms, the appeal of radical religious ideology and the unsettled political situation in Kashmir post 1987, encouraged the Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq, to allow the ISI to proceed with Operation Tupac. This would set the stage for Pakistan's proxy war against India. Lieutenant General Philip Campose noted:

> The plan was essentially meant to take revenge against India for its role in 'dismembering' Pakistan's eastern wing (now Bangladesh) in 1971, following the genocide of Pakistan's Bengali people at the hands of the Pakistani Army during that year.[4]

Operation Tupac envisaged the balkanisation of India by exploiting separatist movements within India, exaggerating minor grievances, encouraging radical religious sentiment and using porous borders with Nepal and Bangladesh. Additionally, there was an extensive smuggling network, allied with India's criminal underworld, to smuggle arms and explosives into India. It was also envisaged that sleeper cells of Pakistani agents would be positioned and activated to carry out acts of sabotage and terrorism against civilian targets in India with a cadre of highly trained terrorists being earmarked for higher value targets. The objective was to create an unmanageable internal security situation for India. As Lieutenant General Campose noted:

President Ronald Reagan in a meeting with President Mohammad Zia Ul Haq of Pakistan in the Oval Office in 12 July 1982. (White House Photographic Collection)

> 'Operation Tupac', undertaken by the Pakistan Army and its ISI, involved diverting the Afghan 'global mujahedeen' to J&K, training disaffected Kashmiri youth in ISI training camps close to the LoC, raising and running a number of India-centric militant organisations like Hizb-ul-Mujahedeen, Hizb-ul-Islam, Allah Tigers, Al Umar Mujahedeen, Harkat-ul-Ansar and Jamaat Hurriyat Conference, instigating and directing an insurgency in J&K, and undertaking terrorist acts in the state and the rest of India. Concurrently, the ISI was employed pro-actively to train and fund Khalistani terrorists to run the Sikh militancy in Indian Punjab. Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e Mohammed were subsequent creations of the ISI.[5]

In this respect, they completely underestimated the ability of the Indian state to withstand internal pressures, to conduct aggressive counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations and to accommodate many divergent views within reason. Nonetheless, Pakistan's efforts succeeded in producing an intensely fraught and violent, internal security environment for India between 1990 and perhaps 2016, with terrorist attacks and attendant civilian casualties being all too common for the Indian public. On occasion, these attacks led to outbreaks of communal violence between different religious groups but, in the main, Indians faced the terrorist threats with an overall level of unity, if sometimes chaotic.

However, one cannot deny that Pakistan, in the 1980s, had much fertile ground to sow with the seeds of terrorism. Punjab's Sikh terrorists were only too willing to continue their own murderous campaign against those Sikhs who did not support Khalistan and Hindus. In the North-East, Assam was restive to the point of explosive, with terrorist movements carrying out ethnically motivated killings with remarkable alacrity. Added to this mix was the new Kashmir problem, where genuine disgust at rigged elections quickly morphed into a vicious pogrom against the Hindu population of the Kashmir Valley. This area was ethnically cleansed, with people being forced to flee the region and many being killed, tortured and raped, sometimes by their erstwhile neighbours.

Table 1 Terrorist attacks in India (06/03/2000 to 20/02/2022)

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists	Not Specified
2000*	1910	1260	573	2260	29
2001	2802	1508	883	3005	108
2002	2329	1255	721	2454	181
2003	2321	1280	524	2328	216
2004	1679	849	531	1465	134
2005	1750	1105	439	1584	111
2006	1376	966	400	1283	146
2007	1290	932	439	1219	113
2008	1122	915	366	1232	92
2009	1158	685	435	1112	31
2010	884	757	359	747	21
2011	555	393	199	465	2
2012	539	274	132	429	2
2013	442	308	177	386	2
2014	523	400	167	441	4
2015	437	176	152	398	3
2016	492	204	178	525	0
2017	443	202	172	437	1
2018	478	217	183	540	0
2019	332	159	132	330	0
2020	299	100	106	385	0
2021	314	116	104	365	0
2022	44	13	9	41	0
Total	23519	14074	7381	23431	1195

Things did not pan out quite as Pakistan expected though. The Assam insurgency was gradually brought under control by aggressive counter-insurgency operations combined with proactive political discussions that brought most insurgent groups into the political mainstream. This pattern was followed through much of the North-East throughout the 1990s and whilst terrorist attacks still occur, the political situation is under control. Similarly, in the Punjab, large scale terrorist violence has ended and whilst there are determined efforts to revive it by Pakistan and Sikhs abroad, there is no support for such a movement and it is reduced to finding grievances amongst Punjab's unemployed youth.

Kashmir, on the other hand, seems more intractable. With the local insurgency largely destroyed, India restored some democratically elected governance to the State despite terrorist attacks from Pakistani supported insurgents being a regular occurrence. Infiltration across the LoC, often with covering fire from Pakistani troops, is a constant problem for India though and in recent times, infiltration has become more difficult. However, much more important, is the fact that the constant terrorist attacks and support being given to paid agitators within the State, led to many confrontations between Indian forces and protestors. This often led to serious casualties on the part of the protestors and much negative attention on India.

Yet, for all its potential, Operation Tupac (or whatever the name of the actual plan), which continues to this day, has not achieved a single discernible political objective. Nonetheless, it shows how a state sponsored terrorism campaign can inflict disproportionate casualties on an adversary and exploit pre-existing fault lines. In India's case, terrorism has a long history and in the twenty-first century has claimed tens of thousands of lives of civilians, security personnel and the terrorists as they themselves were neutralised.

Terrorism Related Violence in India

Since its inception as an independent country, India has suffered heavily from terrorist attacks. The first of these emerged in the restive Indian North-East where linguistic, ethnic and religious tensions spilled over into a vicious series of insurgencies with brutal violence taking a heavy toll. Supported by China and with safe havens in Burma, thanks to poorly guarded borders, these insurgencies lasted for decades and though violence has been dramatically reduced, there are still terrorist attacks from time to time.

The next wave of terrorist violence was born out of India's inequities and became known as the Naxalite movement. After a period of calm, this was resurrected in the 1990s and has continued to pose a serious threat in some states where the local police forces have proved inadequate to deal with the challenges posed by the Naxalites in the vast unpoliced forests of some parts of India. Ostensibly Maoist in ideology, the Naxalites are now a major organised crime syndicate with few scruples.

In the 1980s, some radical Sikh extremists in the State of Punjab, funded by the Sikh diaspora living abroad, began a violent campaign to create a separate ethno-state for Sikhs (called Khalistan) by killing or expelling the Hindu minority, which comprises about 38 percent of Punjab's population. This terrorist movement lasted for nearly 15 years and caused immense suffering in the Punjab before finally, being defeated by the largely Sikh Punjab police. Even as some Sikhs abroad cling to the delusion of separatism and continue to fund terrorist groups from abroad, the Khalistani movement is dead but some terrorist elements are still active and carry out the occasional strike, often with explosives supplied by Pakistan.

The South Asia Terrorism Portal, an extensive resource cataloguing terrorist attacks throughout Southern Asia, gave details of the people – terrorist, civilians and security personnel – killed in terrorist attacks in India from 6 March 2000 to 20 February 2022 as shown in Table 1.[6]

The total number of deaths sustained by India during this period of time is a staggering 46,081. However, it should be noted that included among these totals are, as alluded to above, a large number of deaths inflicted by Left-Wing terrorists operating in Central India and terrorist groups operating in India's North-East, as well as some groups operating in India's state of Punjab in support of Sikh separatism. In fact, it may be said that the leftist terrorist groups are the biggest single contributor to India's terrorism fatalities in the twenty-first century. This does not mean that Kashmir has been peaceful. Far from it.

Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir

For the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir alone, excluding attacks perpetrated by members of terrorist groups operating therein on other parts of India, the fatalities were, for the same period – 6 March 2020 to 20 February 2022 – a total of 21,884:[7]

Table 2 Deaths caused by terrorist attacks in Jammu & Kashmir

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/Insurgents/Extremists	Not Specified
2000*	1385	641	441	1708	9
2001	2084	1024	628	2345	14
2002	1642	837	447	1758	56
2003	1427	563	319	1504	121
2004	1061	437	318	961	72
2005	1004	454	220	987	56
2006	694	256	172	607	90
2007	427	127	119	498	0
2008	261	71	85	382	0
2009	208	53	73	247	0
2010	189	34	69	258	0
2011	119	33	31	117	0
2012	70	19	18	84	0
2013	84	19	53	100	0
2014	91	28	47	114	0
2015	86	19	41	115	0
2016	112	14	88	165	0
2017	163	54	83	220	0
2018	206	86	95	271	0
2019	135	42	78	163	0
2020	140	33	56	232	0
2021	153	36	45	193	0
2022	18	0	5	26	0
Total	11759	4880	3531	13055	418

With over 20,000 fatalities, the terrorist campaign in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir has taken a heavy toll on a small population. However, as can be seen, fatalities are reducing as security forces conduct ever more aggressive counter-insurgency campaigns. India has an extensive list of proscribed terrorist organisations many of which have, at one time or another, received funding and assistance from either Pakistan or China, or both.

Nonetheless, the groups which are most relevant to this book are those operating in, or in support of separatism, in Jammu and Kashmir. It should be noted that these groups have many sub-groups and name changes to avoid detection. This means that a constant watch has to be kept on the groups as shadow organisations and offshoots abound. The list of the organisations pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir is shown in Table 3.[8]

Some of these groups started as local Kashmiri insurgents who would go to Pakistan for training and then re-enter India to conduct operations. In the 1990s, their actions were met by a brutal Indian response which saw many civilian deaths when personnel from the Jammu and Kashmir Police, as well as the Indian Central Armed Police Forces, fired on insurgents and even protestors. Rape was not unknown and extrajudicial killings were common.

As the 1990s progressed, the Indian government outsourced the more brutal aspects of counter-insurgency to the Ikhwan-ul-Mujahideen which was composed of former insurgents and led by Mohammed Yusuf (Kuka) Parray. This force was responsible for the decimation of local insurgents and allowed for a return of free and fair elections to Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1996, the force was largely disbanded and many of its members killed but they had ensured that the insurgency would no longer be a local operation. In addition, improved training, enhanced disciplinary procedures and much greater scrutiny by the Indian National Commission on Human Rights led, if not to the elimination of excesses, certainly a vast improvement in the treatment of civilians during active counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in Kashmir. It would be wrong to say that Indian operations are any less robust than they were in the 1990s but improved tactics have reduced civilian casualties from military actions and also improved accountability, ensures some measure of justice. A dedicated army counter-insurgency force – the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) of 80,000 personnel – combined with troops from the BSF and CRPF, have established an effective counter-insurgency grid with some 230,000

Table 3 Terrorist groups that are operating or operated in Jammu and Kashmir

Proscribed Terrorist Groups	Active Terrorist Groups	Inactive Terrorist Groups (either destroyed, merged or renamed)
Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) Al Umar Mujahideen (AuM) Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM) Harkat-ul Mujahideen (HUM) previously known as Harkat-ul-Ansar Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front (JKIF) Jamait-ul-Mujahideen (JUM) Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Jammu and Kashmir Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front – Yasin Malik faction (JKLF-Y) Islamic State/Islamic State of Iraq and Levant /Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ Daesh (ISIS)	Lashkar-e-Omar (LeO) Al Barq Al Badr All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LeJ) Mutahida Jehad Council [(MJC), aka United Jehad Council (UJC)] Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen (TuM) Muslim Mujahideen Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind	Al Jehad Al Jehad Force Al Mujahid Force (AMF) Al Mustafa Liberation Fighters (AMLF) Ikhwan-ul-Mujahideen (IuM) Islami Inquilabi Mahaz (IIM) Islami Jamaat-e-Tulba (IJT) Islamic Students League (ISL) Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Army (JNLA) Jammu & Kashmir Students Liberation Front (JSLF) Kashmir Jehad Force (KJF) Mahaz-e-Azadi Muslim Janbaz Force (MJF) People's League Tehrik-e-Hurriat-e-Kashmir (TeHK) Tehrik-e-Jehad (TeJ) Tehrik-e-Jehad-e-Islami (TeJI) Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front (JKIF) Al-Mansoorain

Kuka Parray and his Ikhwanis. Parray was a member of the Legislative Assembly of India before founding a pro-Indian militia called Ikhwan-ul-Muslemoon. (PIB)

personnel actively involved in counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

The destruction of the local insurgency meant that Pakistan itself would not merely be an arsenal and safe haven for terrorists but would now become the recruiting centre for a jihadi movement. This was spearheaded by a number of ISI funded groups which operated with impunity in Pakistan and which have been responsible for thousands of civilian deaths in India across the entire country. That Pakistan has the dubious distinction of being host to the largest number of United Nations Proscribed Terrorist Groups and global terrorists under UN sanctions, seems not to matter, and the country has faced relatively few consequences for its proxy war.[9] The US war in Afghanistan which made Pakistan an 'ally' in the War Against Terror, ensured that the country was treated with surprising latitude, despite its evident involvement in serious terrorist incidents in India from groups operating with Pakistani support.

The Jihad Factory

Pakistan has developed the most extensive terrorist training networks in the world. It has managed to create a system where no fewer than 15 terrorist groups divided into five categories with a degree of overlap between the first three:[10]

(1) Globally oriented terrorist groups;
(2) Afghanistan oriented terrorist groups;
(3) India (and Indian Kashmir) oriented terrorist groups;
(4) Domestically oriented groups aimed at disrupting the Pakistani state; and
(5) Sectarian (largely, but not exclusively anti-Shia) terrorist groups.

Of the 15 groups identified by the Congressional Research Service in September 2021, twelve are designated by the US government as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs) and five broad groups (each with many offshoots and aliases) are designated as groups oriented towards terrorist attacks against India and receive extensive Pakistani patronage. These groups are, quoting from the report:

> LeT was formed in the late 1980s in Pakistan and designated as an FTO in 2001. Led by Hafiz Saeed and based in both Pakistan's Punjab province and in Pakistan-administered (Azad) Kashmir, it is more recently fronted by the ostensibly charitable Jamaat-ud-Dawa. LeT was responsible for the major 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India, as well as numerous other high-profile attacks.
>
> JEM was founded in 2000 by Kashmiri militant leader Masood Azhar and was designated as an FTO in 2001. Along with LeT, it was responsible for a 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, among numerous others. Based in both Punjab and in Azad Kashmir, JEM's several hundred armed supporters operate in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while seeking annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. JEM also has openly declared war on the United States.
>
> Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HUJI) was formed in 1980 in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Army and was designated as an FTO in 2010. After 1989, it redirected its efforts towards India, although it did supply fighters to the Afghan Taliban. With an unknown strength, HUJI today operates in Afghanistan,

> Pakistan, Bangladesh and India and seeks annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan.
>
> HUM was designated as an FTO in 1997 and operates mainly from Azad Kashmir and from some Pakistani cities. It was responsible for the 1999 hijacking of an Indian airliner, leading to the release from an Indian prison of JEM's future founder; most HUM cadres subsequently defected to that group.
>
> Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) was formed in 1989 – reportedly as the militant wing of Pakistan's largest Islamist political party – and designated as an FTO in 2017. It is one of the largest and oldest militant groups operating in Indian-administered Kashmir. HM's cadre of unknown size is composed primarily of ethnic Kashmiris who seek independence for Kashmir or annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. Although Kashmir based, HM reportedly has key funding sources in Pakistan'.[11]

These groups are well-funded, well-trained and very well-armed with the full support of the Pakistan Army and the ISI. They have been at the forefront of the proxy war against India and have, at little cost to Pakistan, provided a useful force of irregular soldiers to the Pakistani state apparatus.

Yet, as if this campaign against India was not enough, Pakistan is home to three globally oriented terrorist groups which have been able to carry out attacks far afield, despite their weakened state. It must not be forgotten that Osama Bin Laden was safely ensconced in Abbotabad, Pakistan, only a mile away from the Pakistani Military Academy at Kakul, until his execution by US Navy SEALS on 2 May 2011. These globally oriented terrorist groups are, once again quoting from the Congressional Research Service report of September 2021:

> Al Qaeda (AQ) 'core' was established by Osama bin Laden in 1988 in Afghanistan and was designated by the United States as an FTO in 1999. US led forces expelled AQ from Afghanistan following the group's commission of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Since then, AQ has operated primarily from the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, now incorporated into Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) and in the megacity of Karachi, as well as in Afghanistan. It has, since 2011 been led by Ayman al-Zawahiri and reportedly maintains supportive ties with many of the groups listed below.
>
> Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was established in 2014 under the leadership of Asim Umar – a now-deceased Indian national and former member of a Kashmiri terrorist group – and was designated as an FTO in 2016. With an estimated several hundred members, AQIS has been implicated in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, including a 2014 attempt to hijack a Pakistan Navy frigate.
>
> Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP or IS-K) is a regional affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, ISIL, or the Arabic acronym Da'esh) that made inroads into Afghanistan in 2015 and was designated as an FTO in 2016. It is estimated 1,500–2,200 fighters are mostly former members of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan who are based in Afghanistan but also operate in Pakistan, along with disaffected Afghan Taliban fighters.[12]

Pakistan has long been a supporter of terrorist groups in Afghanistan and is known to be the home of the Taliban, though the latter, now that it is in control of Afghanistan, seems to be somewhat more antagonistic towards Pakistan than the Pakistani expected. However, with the Taliban in control of Afghanistan, Pakistan's Haqqani network presents both the Taliban government in Afghanistan and Pakistan itself, with significant challenges. The links between the Haqqani network and Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency are well known:

> The Haqqani Network (HQN) was founded in the late 1980s by Jalaluddin Haqqani and designated as an FTO in 2012. Jalaluddin retreated to Pakistan after 2001 and his son Sirajuddin later became the group's leader, also becoming a deputy chief of the Afghan Taliban in 2015 and Afghanistan's acting interior minister in 2021. HQN reportedly has several hundred core members and an estimated 3,000–5,000 armed militants with varying degrees of affiliation, many of whom reportedly operate near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and have undertaken numerous kidnappings and attacks in Afghanistan. Some US officials have linked HQN to Pakistan's main intelligence service, a charge Pakistan denies.[13]

Of course, Pakistan, having created the monster, can no longer fully control it. The Pakistani state has never been particularly gentle with its non-Punjabi population and has had to deal with an insurgency in Balochistan almost, since its 1947 independence. There are three main terrorist groups fighting the Pakistani state, the first of which has often been able to force the Pakistani state to buckle whilst the second, has been increasingly assertive in attacking, often successfully, Pakistani troops and installations in Balochistan. These three groups are:

> Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed in 2007 and designated as an FTO in 2010. It is composed largely of ethnic Pashtun militants who unified under the leadership of now-deceased Baitullah Mehsud, then based in the former South Waziristan FATA agency, with representatives from each of Pakistan's seven former tribal agencies. TTP leadership reportedly fled into the border areas of eastern Afghanistan in response to Pakistani military operations in 2014. Today, led by Noor Wali Mehsud, and with suspected links to Al Qaeda, the TTP's estimated 3,000–6,000 members seek to defeat Pakistan's government and establish Sharia law in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
>
> Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which the State Department named as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2019, is an ethnic-based separatist group of up to 1,000 armed militants operating mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of Pakistan.
>
> Jundallah (aka Jaysh al-Adl), designated as an FTO in 2010, is an ethnic Baloch separatist group operating in Pakistan's Balochistan province. It is oriented primarily towards Iran and its ethnic Baloch regions.[14]

Despite Pakistan itself facing significant internal difficulties from insurgent groups – some of which have demonstrated an ability to inflict casualties and embarrassment out of all proportion to their numbers – it remains wedded to using terrorist groups as military assets.

Pakistan's Denial in the Face of Reality

Pakistan has consistently denied supporting terrorist groups operating against any country, claiming that it provides only 'moral and political support' to separatist groups in India. Its Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) department, a pliant media and the efforts of a diplomatic corps that is determined to obfuscate and otherwise distract from the evidence of extensive support for terrorism, have been largely successful in ensuring that the country has escaped the

Leader of Jamaat-ud-Dawa/Allah-o-Akbar Hafiz Saeed, at a meeting in Islamabad during the 2018 Pakistani general election. (VOA)

worst sanctions for its actions. The country was, however, in June 2018, placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) 'grey list' for its failure to restrict or otherwise curtail funding for terrorist groups.[15] It has remained on the list ever since, with its financial situation being always precarious.

Furthermore, Pakistan has shown little to no inclination to punish terrorists accused of planning or executing attacks on India. Nowhere was this more evident than its lenient treatment of UN sanctioned terrorist Hafiz Muhammed Saeed, leader and chief of the UN proscribed terrorist group LeT which carried out multiple terrorist attacks on India, including those in Mumbai on 26 November 2008.[16] Saeed was initially released from house arrest after a farcical series of half-hearted judicial proceedings, despite a US$10 million bounty for his arrest being offered. Saeed, whose planning role for the Mumbai attacks has been documented, walked free in December 2019 but was rearrested and eventually convicted in 2020 for financing terrorist operations.[17]

Cynics have suggested this arrest was to remove the country from the FATF 'grey list' but, two years later, it does seem to have worked, with the country set to be removed from the list in late 2022. Indeed, in June 2022, Pakistan suddenly discovered who planned the 26 November 2008 Mumbai attacks – Sajid Mir – whom Pakistan had previously claimed to be dead. India strongly believes that the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks enjoy Pakistani government patronage and fears their release once Pakistan comes off the 'grey list'.[18] This gains credence from the fact that the LeT has been operating charity wings – the Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the affiliated Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation. These 'charity' wings are used to evade UN sanctions and recruit, fund and train terrorists without fear of state intervention and are safe from any unfavourable scrutiny.[19]

It should be noted that each terror attack has eroded the credibility of Western media outlets in India, to the point of their being treated with near contempt. The inability of Western media outlets to term even UN designated terrorist groups like the LeT and JEM as 'terrorists', with the BBC dignifying the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attacks as mere 'gunmen', has led to deep resentment in India at the apparent double standards in reporting.

Furthermore, Pakistan has faced few consequences for supporting terrorism. It has been decided that these groups are useful in keeping a conflict with India going; thus, keeping the Pakistani military and ISI relevant and as such, being given a disproportionate share of the country's resources, with attendant political and economic power. They have not, however, achieved any political or military objective against India. In fact, as India's capacity to respond and even absorb attacks has grown, the risk now is that terrorist attacks may bring about unforeseen consequences for Pakistan.

This latter point is where this book's central story begins. From the Mumbai attacks of 2008 to the Pulwama attack of 2019, India's response has been completely transformed. From being satisfied with diplomatic, economic and political measures of dubious efficacy, India has decided to use military force and disprove the fear that military responses to terrorist attacks will inevitably, lead to uncontrollable escalation between two nuclear powers. The path to this revised approach started in 2008, shortly after the Mumbai attacks, when India was still reeling from the psychological trauma that they inflicted. As will be shown, India's failure to respond militarily in 2008 weighed heavily in 2016 when the Uri attack took place and even more so, in 2019 in the aftermath of the devastating Pulwama attack.

3

MUMBAI 2008

On 26 November 2008, a team of 10 terrorists from LeT launched a series of murderous attacks on civilians in the heart of India's commercial capital, Mumbai. These attacks, which lasted for about three days, for the first time targeted hotels frequented by foreigners, killed some 175 people, including nine of the terrorists, 15 police personnel, two from the Railway Protection Force, two Indian NSG commandos and 29 foreign nationals. Over 300 were wounded and several hotels were put out of action for some time. In addition, by attacking a hospital and a railway terminus, the terrorists showed their intent to cause mass casualties, regardless of socio-economic or religious background.

To say this attack was a watershed in India's perception of Pakistani terrorism and marked a hardening of attitudes, is an understatement. The fact that all the attackers were Pakistani and that Pakistan allowed the LeT to operate with virtual impunity was galling, as were the multiple attempts by Pakistani spokespersons to divert attention away from the obvious link between the terrorists and Pakistani groups. This annoyance continues with Pakistan, which claimed between 2008 and 2022 that Sajid Mir, the mastermind of the attacks, was dead, suddenly finding and 'arresting' him in June 2022 – a move that seems geared towards placating FATF rather than presaging any tangible action against him.

The initial scepticism from Western media outlets about the origins of the terrorists was also irritating to India as it seemed as if it was almost wilful blindness to Pakistan's involvement. Even after the identities of the terrorists had been disclosed, there was a reluctance among Western media outlets to dub them 'terrorists' or to appreciate the magnitude of the attack on India or its anger.

India's response to the attacks was typical of its relatively soft approach to dealing with such issues. Whilst it made many internal changes, as will be discussed, externally, it relied heavily on its diplomatic efforts to build its case against the terrorist groups and their supporters in Pakistan. This was partly effective but ultimately, as will also be seen, failed to pay dividends. Whilst a military option was offered to the government of the day, it chose not to exercise the same, for reasons best known to itself. The knowledge that an option was offered but not taken in the aftermath of these devastating attacks, remains a sore point to this day.

India's lack of a military response to the attacks was also a matter of domestic irritation which later morphed into anger. However, the attacks showed India the limits of diplomatic pressure and the lessons learnt were not forgotten. The equivocal assistance provided by foreign intelligence and law enforcement agencies was also noted and whilst there was some appreciation for expertise, the lack of an effective intelligence sharing mechanism continues thanks to a reluctance on the part of Western agencies to 'trust' their Indian counterparts. A feeling that is heartily reciprocated from the Indian side and with good reason.

The Mumbai attacks also showed up the weaknesses in Indian coastal security and urban counter-terrorism capabilities of the Indian state. Much effort was spent subsequent to the attacks with a great deal of success in the former case, in strengthening those capabilities. Police forces, though still poorly trained and equipped, finally formed effective counter-terrorist, rapid response units whilst there was a renewed emphasis on joint exercises in an urban environment.

The Mumbai police came under severe, and partly justified, criticism. However, as will be shown, they responded to every incident and despite being completely outgunned and outmatched, they did some good work at Cama hospital. Despite losing almost the entire senior leadership of the force's Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) in an ambush, there was no shortage of courage among the largely unarmed personnel of the Mumbai police force. Fortunately, there is a detailed report on their response which also serves as an excellent timeline and exposition as to how the attacks unfolded.

In addition, the Mumbai police were responsible for the one action which revealed Pakistani involvement – the capture, alive, of one of the terrorists. This single act changed the entire discourse of the event. No longer was it possible to dismiss this attack as being from disgruntled elements in India or from Kashmiri insurgents. This was a terrorist attack planned and perpetrated by a Pakistani terrorist group with known links to the ISI and using Pakistani personnel. All the terrorists were identified as Pakistanis and protestations of Pakistani innocence were now futile.

Pakistani terrorist Sajid Mir. A member of the LeT terrorist group, he was the main planner of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. (FBI)

The Indian counter-terrorist force – the National Security Guards (NSG) – performed extremely well given constraints of location, transport and substantial neglect for some years. Conducting one of the most complicated counter-terrorist, hostage rescue operations in history, they literally scoured two multi-story hotels, each with hundreds of rooms, room by room to rescue hostages and neutralise terrorists. Without their efforts, the death toll from the attacks would have been much higher. In the aftermath of these attacks, the NSG was expanded and much more emphasis was placed on urban counter-terrorism and hostage rescue. It received a major improvement in its equipment with the force now being able to respond to multiple incidents across the country, simultaneously.

India's population reacted, after the initial shock, with anger directed at Pakistan. Religious and even political divisions were put aside, as they usually are when incidents like this take place. The Opposition tried to make it a political issue in the elections held in 2009 and utterly failed. It was a lesson that the Opposition in 2019 failed to learn, to its great cost, as a new government adopted a much harsher and more aggressive response to terrorism with the support of the overwhelming majority of Indians and to considerable electoral benefit.

Finally, one underestimated aspect of the attacks of 26 November is the impact on the national psyche of the country. On one hand, it realised how vulnerable it was to terrorist attacks and how easily gaps in the security apparatus could be exploited. On the other, it learnt once again, how ultimately, ineffective were the gestures of moral support from the international community in the face of sustained terrorist attacks. The country also realised, despite protestations to the contrary, from its 'friends', that it would not receive tangible help or support from anyone. It would have to deal with terrorism on its own.

The Attack

Mumbai was no stranger to terrorist attacks, being subject to a series of major bomb blasts in 1993 that killed 257 people and a series of seven train bombings in 2006 which killed 209. However, the 2008 attacks were carefully planned and prepared to cause the maximum psychological shock while killing as many people as possible. To accomplish this, the LeT, the ISI and its network of sympathisers, agents and operatives in Pakistan, India and elsewhere, planned meticulously over a period of years. In every respect, the operation was designed with precision, with thorough pre-attack reconnaissance of the selected targets.[1]

David Headley (born Daood Sayed Gilani), now incarcerated in the United States, served as the LeT's roving reconnaissance agent. Together with LeT operatives in India, he conducted a thorough assessment of the Taj and Oberoi/Trident hotels, as well as other possible targets. Headley was provided with a model of the Taj by the ISI and helped, through physically visiting the buildings, the ISI to prepare blueprints of the Taj and other hotels. Between 24 and 26 recruits were selected by the ISI for specialised LeT training and out of these, 10 were selected for the final assault. All of the attackers were Pakistani nationals, although they had some considerable assistance from up to 40 LeT operatives in Mumbai who were able to provide logistical support to the attackers.[2]

The LeT decided on a seaborne insertion of its terrorists. Rightly, this sought to exploit the fact that whilst India had strong surveillance of its international maritime areas, closer to shore it was possible, not only to evade Indian patrols, but also to exploit the absence of an effective coastal police force. There were only five boats available to the Mumbai police force to patrol a significant expanse of coastline. To ensure the success of the insertion, the LeT strike team captured the Indian fishing vessel, the *MV Kuber*, killing four of its crew and forcing its captain, Amar Singh Solanki, to steer the vessel through Indian waters, where no suspicions would be aroused. As the vessel neared Mumbai, Solanki's throat was cut and the *Kuber* was abandoned with the attackers choosing to make their final approach in dinghies, laden with backpacks containing their weapons, explosives, ammunition and other supplies.[3]

The 10 attackers were later positively identified as: Ajmal Amir Kasab from Faridkot, Abu Ismail Dera Ismail Khan from Dera Ismail Khan, Hafiz Arshad and Babr Imran from Multan, Javed from Okara, Shoaib from Sialkot, Nazir Ahmed and Nasir from Faisalabad, Abdul Rahman from Arifwalla, and Fahadullah from Dipalpur Taluk.[4] The men, to disguise their religious identities, wore Hindu Rudrakshmalas on their wrists, hoping to create sufficient uncertainty about their identities to allow Pakistan to deny involvement in the attacks. This particular stratagem played to Indian internal political divisions where the ruling INC led, UPA dispensation had created a mirage of 'Saffron terror' apparently in the hope that it would reap political dividends. To date, this approach adopted by the INC has created great bitterness among India's Hindus who saw this as a cynical ploy.

The attackers were well supplied for a prolonged operation – they carried dried fruits and nuts for energy, had medical supplies and had been using steroids in the run-up to the attack. They were provided with excellent communication devices in the form of a satellite phone, with which they spoke with their handlers in Pakistan – intercepts of which were recorded by Indian intelligence agencies – and cell phones with which they communicated with Indian media outlets, trying even as they murdered hostages, to make demands of the Indian and foreign governments. They were also extremely well-armed with RDX, Norinco hand grenades, IEDs and Kalashnikov type assault rifles with ample ammunition supplies.

David Headley. Born in the United States, David made periodic trips to Pakistan for LeT training. (PTI)

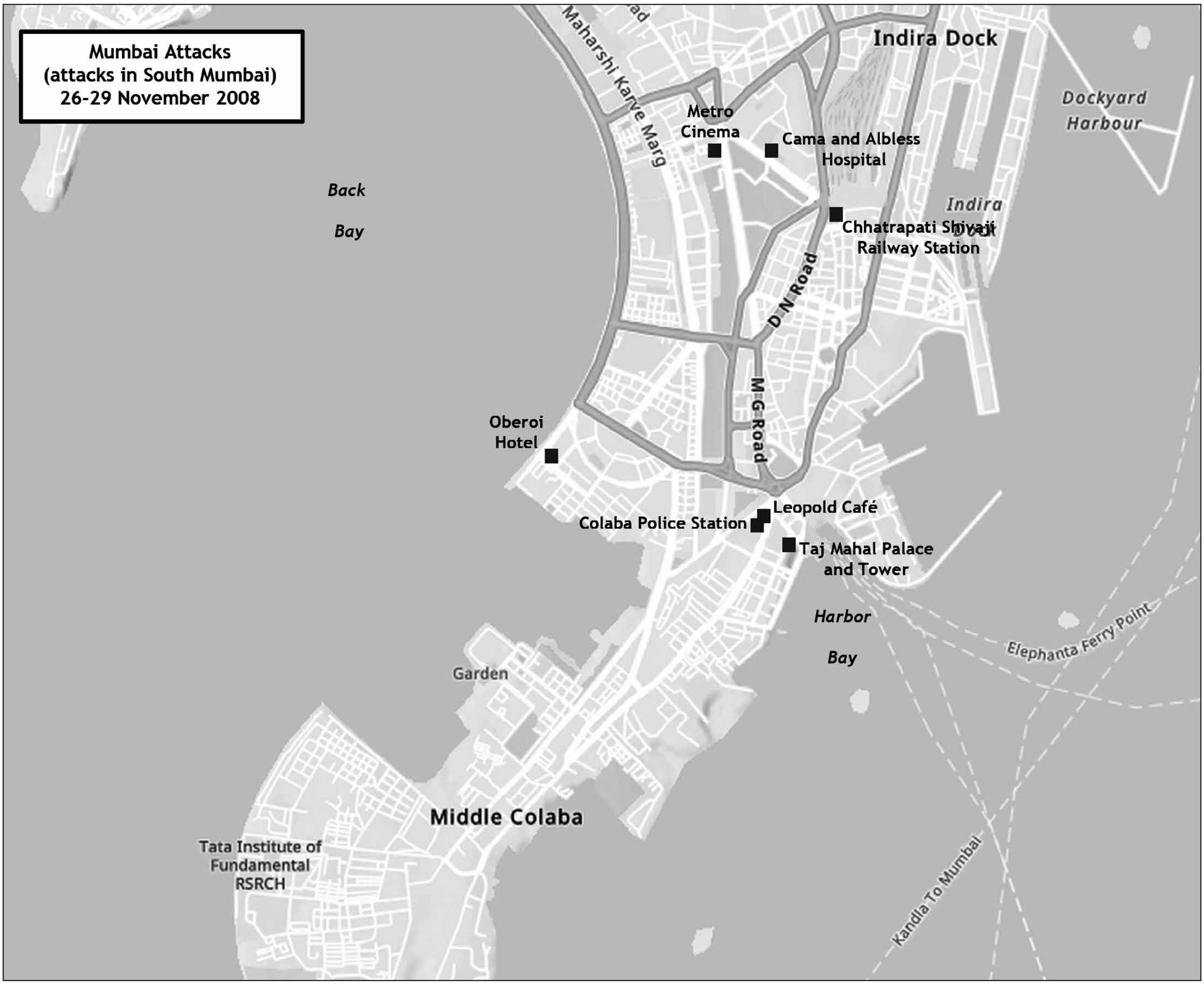
Soon after the attacks, there were assertions that Indian intelligence agencies had provided alerts to the Mumbai police and to high-end hotels, that a seaborne assault could be mounted. It is certain that these alerts had strongly raised the issue of bomb blasts at hotels as some site visits were undertaken to check security. However, it was unclear as to the extent of the alert until the Ram Pradhan Committee (referenced in detail later) noted the following:

> 13. Later, on receipt of IB alert dated 24/9/2008 that LeT was showing 'interest' on certain targets like Taj Mahal Palace Hotel et cetera another meeting was held with Taj Security Officials on 29/9/2008 by DCP Zone-1 when Shri Karam Bir Kang, General Manager of the hotel was also present. The DCP Zone-1 visited the Taj Hotel again on 30/9/2008 to personally brief the security officials.
>
> 14. In this context the Committee is constrained to observe that tragically the Taj and the Oberoi managements did not implement certain important security advice given by DCP Zone-1 because of their own policy perspective as hospitality industry. The Committee has noted that no request was received from Taj or other hotels to augment police security for them in view of such alert'.[5]

After abandoning the Kuber and embarking onto their dinghies, the attackers moved towards the Mumbai shoreline and approached the Macchimar Naga boat ramp at Colaba from which Mumbai's fishermen launch their vessels into the Arabian Sea. It is also a spot with many eateries and while more deserted than usual – many of the fisherfolk were watching a cricket match – the motor dinghy was noted by those on shore.[6]

Bharat Tandel observed the dinghy coming to the ramp, full of clean-shaven young men, heavily laden with baggage. Tandel observed the vessel up to the point where it reached the ramp, eight attackers disembarking with backpacks, with two others remaining in the dinghy and motoring back out to sea. Tandel's neighbour, Bharat Tamore, confronted the men who tersely dismissed him, telling him that they were 'stressed'.

Each of the men carried a 15kg backpack with a rifle, six loaded magazines and 200 additional rounds plus RDX, an 8kg IED and a mobile phone with an Indian SIM card. Each pair also carried a GPS handset to find their targets. Splitting into pairs, they secured


Mumbai Attacks
(attacks in South Mumbai)
26-29 November 2008
Maharshi Karve Marg
Indira Dock
Dockyard Harbour
Metro Cinema
Cama and Albless Hospital
Back Bay
Indira Dock
Chhatrapati Shivaji Railway Station
D N Road
M G Road
Oberoi Hotel
Leopold Café
Colaba Police Station
Taj Mahal Palace and Tower
Harbor Bay
Elephanta Ferry Point
Garden
Middle Colaba
Tata Institute of Fundamental RSRCH
Kandla To Mumbai

From 26 to 29 November 2008, Mumbai was subjected to a series of terrorist attacks by 10 members of LeT. At least 175 people were killed (including nine attackers) and over 300 wounded. Seven of the attacks occurred in South Mumbai, the map of which is shown here. (Map by Tom Cooper)

transport and moved towards their assigned targets.[7] The attacks were about to start.

Table 4 The terrorists and their targets

Target	Terrorists Assigned
The Taj	Shoaib, a.k.a. Soaib Hafeez Arshad, a.k.a. Abdul Rehman Javed, a.k.a. Abu Ali Nazeer, a.k.a. Abu Umer
Nariman House	Nasir Babbar Imran, a.k.a., Abu Akasha
CST and Cama Hospital	Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab Abu Ismail
The Trident and Oberoi	Abdul Rehman, a.k.a. Abdul Rehman Chota Fahadullah, a.k.a. Abu Fahad

Timeline of Attacks and Response

In examining the attacks of 26 November 2008, the report of the Ram Pradhan inquiry committee is available. This report – still unpublished and formally restricted to the government and assembly of Maharastra – is not even paginated but its text was made available for download by the Times of India newspaper. From this report, the relevant text outlining the timeframe of the attacks is to be found in its recitation of the police response to the attacks. These started at the Leopold Café and later encompassed the Taj and Oberoi hotels, Cama Hospital, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station and Nariman House. The relevant sections of the report make for painful reading, as a poorly equipped police force sought to control a desperate situation, aided by small detachments of Marine Commandos who were rushed into action. These sections, given for each of the attacks, also show the timeline and the actions taken by Marine Commandos and the NSG to rescue hostages and eliminate the terrorists.

Leopold Café

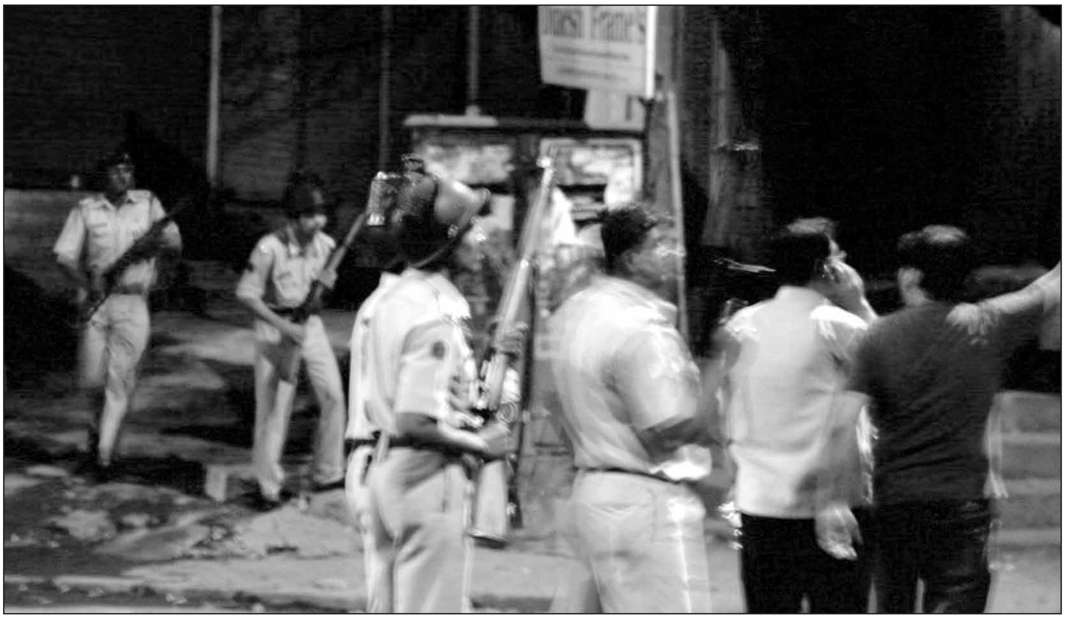
The Leopold Café is a popular eatery located on the Colaba Causeway in South Mumbai. Two of the terrorists – Shoaib (a.k.a. Soheb) and Nazir (a.k.a. Abu Umer) opened fire at the café and killed 10 people. There is no better account available for the sequence of events and the early response to the attacks than the Pradhan committee report and as such, it is a necessary evil to reproduce these sections in full:

> 3.20 There was no chance of a police response when terrorists attacked Leopold Café at about 2130 hrs. Two terrorists suddenly walked in and began firing indiscriminately. As mentioned earlier, the initial call to the Control room at about 2150 hrs did not indicate any details except that some people were injured. Colaba-1 which has a staff of 5 men with 2 SLR and gas guns reached the spot within minutes. By that time, the terrorists had already started hastening towards Taj and might have even reached there. Within a short time 9 persons were dead and 21 injured including, two policemen of Colaba Police Station who were in mobile squads which rushed to the spot. After firing, the terrorists walked along Navroji Ferdoj road spraying bullets along the way, killing and planting IED (RDX 8kgs), on a side lane, near Gokul Bar on Tullock road, which fortunately did not explode.
>
> 1. This unclaimed bag was detected by the public who informed PI Shri Prakash Sampatrao Bhoite of Colaba P. Stn. on 27th morning who summoned BDDS squad and they defused it. From there walking towards Merry Weather Road, they entered the Taj hotel by a side entrance named Northcote at 2143 hours. All that the police could do at the Leopold Café was removing the injured to the hospital in which Shri Nagarale took leading part although, being on deputation to the MSEDCL he had no jurisdiction as such.
> 2. Two policemen from Colaba Police station injured while facing terrorists were: PN 28388 – Shri Pravin Pandurang Sawant (Colaba-1 Mobile) and PN 4124 – Shri Nivrutti Gavane.[8]

The Leopold Café was then followed by two bomb blasts in taxis, detonated by timers. One was at Vile Parle at about 2240 hrs and the other was at Wadi Bunder at between 2220 hrs and 2225hrs. In these attacks, three people were killed and 15 injured.

Taj Mahal Palace Hotel

The prize target for the terrorists was at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. At this site, there were no fewer than six explosions – one in the hotel lobby, two in elevators and three in one of the hotel's restaurants. At least four terrorists entered the hotel, shooting at guests, and trying to take hostages, separating Muslim from non-Muslims and looking for foreign nationals. Some 30 people were killed at the Taj Mahal Palace and in this case, the security response showed up the inadequacies of the Mumbai police in a glaring manner:


Mumbai Police at Colaba. Colaba is an island in ancient Mumbai, famous for its luxury shops and home to the Taj Mahal Palace. (PTI)

> 3.21 The senior officers who dealt with the situation in Taj Palace Hotel were (1) Shri Vishwas Nangre Patil, DCP (Zone-1) (2) Shri Rajvardhan, DCP(SB-2), (3) Shri Hemant Nagarale, Director (Security), MSEDCL and (4) Shri K.L. Prasad, Jt. C.P. (L&O). Two terrorists stealthily entered from the main lobby (of Taj Towers) while the other 2 who had done the shooting at Leopold, entered by North Cote entrance (of Heritage Taj) and joined up with the other two. The first police party reaching Taj Place Hotel, headed by DCP Shri Vishwas Nangre Patil and his team, reached Taj well after these 4 terrorists had killed a number of persons in the Coffee Shop, Swimming Pool area and passage in front of the lifts of the Heritage Taj. Terrorists had then rushed to the fifth/ sixth floors indulging in the killing. Interviews with the police officials as well as hotel security staff revealed that the police party which entered Taj was totally handicapped because they had only one SLR, one .303 and officers had their normal duty revolvers or pistols. When DCP Zone-1 rushed on the second floor of the Heritage Taj he heard some noise and shots on sixth floor (South wing). In order to detect their exact location, the police party accompanied by Shri Kudiyadi, security officer of Taj, rushed in [to] the area between the south and the north wings and fired a round in their direction to draw fire. The terrorists ran towards the middle (connecting the two wings of the Heritage building) and strategically positioned themselves at vantage positions on the 'Royal Staircase' from where they could observe any movement on the staircase. That gave them clear view of any counter-attack and also enabled them to fire & throw grenades at the approaching police party. Despite being thus handicapped, DCPs Shri Nangre Patil and Shri Rajvardhan who joined him, showed remarkable grit and courage in trying to engage the terrorists from a lower level position on the staircase. According to Taj hotel security manager Shri Kudiyadi it seemed that one terrorist was injured in the firing by Shri Nangre Patil.
>
> 3.22.1 PSI, Shri Nitin Digambar Kakade, who was posted in Gateway of India Chowky (Out post) near Taj had rushed to Leopold Café, on orders from the Control Room, to assist removal of the injured to hospitals. In the meanwhile, Shri Nagrale, who was in civilian clothes, had noticed a bag lying beside the Chowky located across the road on right of the entrance Porch. He suspected that it might be RDX and with the help of policeman got the crowd move away from the spot and got it covered with sandbags. On return, PSI Shri Kakade detected that it was indeed 8kg RDX and called the Bomb Squad which defused the bomb. This timely action by S/Shri Nagarale and Kakade avoided a major tragedy. Thereafter Shri Kakade joined the small group of police party within the Heritage Taj, led by young DCPs S/Shri Nangre Patil and Rajvardhan, to flush out the terrorists who were

playing 'hide & seek' with the police party. In the course of that encounter, PC Shri Rahul Subhash Shinde (SRP) died in AK-47 firing. PC Samadhan More was injured by grenade-splinters. W/T operator Shri Amit Khetle sustained bullet injury on his stomach. Inspector Shri Deepak Narasu Dhole and, Police Naik Shri Arun Sarjerao Mane and PSI Shri Kakade suffered severe burn injuries. DCP Rajvardhan too sustained injuries on his foot from grenade/AK-47 attacks while trying to take position on the staircase to shoot at the terrorists. PN Shri Ashok Laxman Pawar, PC Shri Sudagar Nivrutti Shinde, PC Shri Raju Pandurang Mane, PC Shri Vihwanath Gaikwad and PC Shri Gomasse also were injured.

3.22.2 From the control room logs it was seen that DCP Z[one]-1 was repeatedly asking for reinforcements to take on the terrorists at 0046, 0052 hrs etc on 27th saying that he and Shri Rajvardhan had fired at them at various positions but they were throwing grenades. It was also seen that he was repeatedly asking the C/R when Naval Commandos were expected since 'we are losing lives'. At 0214 hrs he was telling C/R that terrorists were tying up hostages. The police had only .303 rifles. At that time Beat Marshall (Colaba) reported that Marine Commandos had reached Northcote entrance. At 0227 Sr.PI Colaba reported that only 7 Marine Commandos had come & they were advancing very slowly. Police posted outside Taj had to perform several roles not necessarily connected with their area of operations. For example, at 0336 hrs on 27th Fire Brigade reported to Sr.PI Colaba that their Snorkel ladder was out of order & needed help. At 0337 hrs. they reported that Fire Brigade water had exhausted and wanted police escort to go to Azad Maidan well or for getting water tankers. Police also had to use their vehicles to shift injured public to the hospitals. Till the army columns reached Taj periphery (According to Chief Secretary's report they reached at 0215hrs on 27th) the entire cordon around Taj & Leopold Café had to be managed by the local police. Shri Rajvardhan while on the spot found that cellular communication between the police groups (on the Royal Staircase and those behind the wall adjoining the landing place) was hampered because of thick wall. The only Wireless set (W/T) in his group was with DCP Zone-1's body guard but he was injured. They noticed that the terrorists were very professionally trained & were using the tactics of 'area clearing' by throwing grenades. The small hand grenades that they were using had great lethal power. Had the police been able to counter-attack with grenades (area weapons) they could have perhaps neutralised this attack. Finding themselves inadequate to counter-attack and after deaths and injuries sustained by the police party they decided to exit. In the main Lobby they met with Shri K.L. Prasad Joint CP(L&O) and briefed the Marine Commandos who had arrived by then.

1. Shri K.L. Prasad told the Committee that before the incident he had paid a visit to Taj on Nov 11th just to see the security arrangements. Even his car was not allowed to be driven into the main porch. On 27th at 0210 hrs he went to Taj from Control Room where he was present since 2230 hrs. He could not proceed towards Taj Heritage staircase because of firing and as grenades were being thrown on the stairs. At about 0240 hrs. He went to the Tower side to climb up when he received a call from DGP that people were stuck in Chambers (an exclusive club for the elite businessmen/industrialists). He went there and saw some people standing. He called a few chefs & did orderly evacuation of about 20–30 people. Police did not know the topography. Then he suddenly heard a lot of commotion & firing at about 0300 from the Central Stairway. He called Fire Brigade and rescued 48 people stuck in Gateway Room on the first floor. 52 people who were stuck in Zodiac Grill on the ground floor were also rescued. At 0330 hrs DGP again called that terrorists were hiding in Chambers and that one person was shot while coming out on the staircase of Chambers. He rushed there, found one injured who was taken out. He had no BP vests and had with him 3 bodyguards with SLRs. It was only at 0400 hrs that he could establish contact with Shri Viswas Nangre Patil DCP Z[one]-1 who told him that there were 4 terrorists. Till then he had no idea how many terrorists were present.

2. Meanwhile Marine Commandos (8) arrived. Shri Prasad briefed them and took them to Chambers. They responded terrorist fire & lobbed tear gas on a terrorist who was hiding. 47 tear gas shells were lobbed. However, there was no trace of terrorists. He found that Chambers had several exists. He was mostly in the foyer, Chambers and the kitchen. From there he was also busy contacting Air Force for vehicles to transport NSG contingent. NSG landed at 0556. At 0730 hrs NSG senior Staff came and he briefed them. Marine Commandos withdrew. Then onwards he gave logistical support to NSG's operations. Taj security officers S/Shri Sunil Kudiyadi and Philip Rodrigues were of invaluable support to the Police & NSG for 60 hours.

3. Rear Admiral R.K. Pattanaik, Chief of Staff Western Naval Command had stated in his letter dated 30th Jan 2009 to the Chief Secretary that Marine Commandos consisting 2 officers and 16 men reached Taj at about 1-45am on 27th. He said that terrorists managed to escape from the 'Numerous entrances/exits of the kitchen'. Everything was peaceful till 0330 hrs when gunshots were heard from Chambers where a heavy exchange of fire took place between terrorists and Marine Commandos injuring 2 of the latter. Marine Commandos could not directly confront any terrorist but they could segregate the stranded guests and lead them to safety.

4. Later it was found that the terrorists had 4 AK-47 assault rifles, magazines, several rounds of ammunition, 4 pistols with considerable ammunition and at least 40 grenades whereas the Police had only carbines and pistols.

3.23.5 When asked about the entry of the 2 terrorists through the main entrance of the Taj Palace, the hotel security staff explained that they and the staff deployed outside at the entrance were very busy in controlling the mob of people thronging the Gateway area, who attempted to rush into the hotel in panic when they learnt of the Leopold firing and probably heard noise of firing by the terrorists rushing towards Taj. In that confusion the two terrorists stealthily entered the main lobby.[9]

Particular tribute has to be paid to the Mumbai Fire Brigade which, arriving in response to the explosions and fire, was able to evacuate over 200 guests. The Marine Commandos, too few in number to do more than contain the terrorists and evacuate guests, were instrumental in saving lives but were completely unfamiliar with the layout of the hotel. As the scale of the hostage situation became clear, all forces – police, commandos, hastily assembled army personnel and CAPF units rushing to the scene to reinforce the police – realised that they needed to await the arrival of the NSGs, en route from Delhi.[10]

Trident/Oberoi

Nearly simultaneously, a similar assault was being made on the Trident/Oberoi hotel complex. In this case, the response was even more chaotic as the Naval Commandos who belatedly arrived to assist, were less successful in either containing the terrorists or evacuating guests. The police were, as usual outgunned, but also, an explosion near the lobby started fires severe enough to hamper efforts to engage the terrorists. No fewer than 30 people were also killed at this complex as the response was at best, erratic:

The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel on fire in the early hours of the attack when bombs were detonated in November 2008. (Trakesht)

> 3.24 The first police officer to enter Trident/Oberoi was Police Inspector Shri Bhagwat Kacharu Bansode of Marine Drive Police Station, who was on night patrol duty near Trident. At 2151 hrs he received a message that firing had taken place at Trident. He reached there in 3–4 minutes. He had only a revolver. On entering the covered passage leading up to the main entrance of Trident he found that the glass frontage of the shop on [the] left at (sic) Trident was shattered. The right side entrance glass-door was found cracked with bullet marks. On entering the lobby, they realised that it was a big attack. They looked around for terrorists but found several guests injured and dead in the lobby. Soon thereafter Marine Drive Mobiles-1 & 2 (ASI Shri Digambar Y. Rane, ASI Shri Shankar B. Chaudhari) and Beat Marshall (4) Head Constable Shri Suresh Bhosle arrived.
>
> 3.25 All the major killings in the lobby, Opium Den, Systems Room of the Trident, Brioni shop situated in the passage connecting Oberoi with Trident, as well as the Tiffin coffee shop of the Oberoi, had taken place before the police came. The RDX bomb placed outside Trident exploded at 2215 [hrs].
>
> 3.26 The police party cautiously climbed [the] stairway leading to Oberoi. In the vestibule they found the Brioni shop windows shattered and a foreigner lying dead in the passage. On entry in the Atrium, they found that on the left side restaurant (Tiffin) a number of dead bodies were lying. On seeing them, a steward of Tiffin, who had fortunately survived, pointed his finger upwards towards the second floor. Shri Bansode then saw a terrorist kicking an employee near 'Kandhahar'. Another terrorist was near him. He fired once at one of them. The terrorist crouched and returned the fire. He again fired. The other terrorist also fired at him and also lobbed grenades.
>
> 3.27 Like in the Heritage Taj, the terrorists positioned themselves on higher floor of the 'Atrium' to direct attack on the police. That made it impossible for the police to go across the vast 'Atrium'. Moreover, the RDX bomb placed adjacent to Oberoi lobby exploded at 2230 hours and caused much damage, igniting fires and making it impossible for anyone to carry out [an] assault. Since they were no match to them in fire power, the police had to retreat.
>
> 3.28 Commander (Retd) Shri Nagmote, a former naval officer and is presently security manager of the Trident/Oberoi confirmed that even the 'Marcos' (Navy Commandos), who later came in to flush out terrorists, could not advance because of these reasons. All the local police could do was (a) to engage and pin down terrorists through firing from outside which was done by Shri Parambir Singh, Addl.CP (ATS) and his group or (b) rescue and lifesaving done by Shri Vinay Kargaonkar, Addl.CP (Protection) or (c) cordon operations and management of crowd outside done by Dr. Venkatesham, Addl. CP (South) till NSG came. The Police cordoned off the area, sealed exit points, rescued trapped people, helped [the] fire brigade in carrying out their activities since they could not carry out anti-terrorist operations like flushing out terrorists further. ATS squad under PI Arvind Bapu Sawant tried to enter through the fire escape in the lower lobby (NCPA side) with QRT staff but it was dark and filled with smoke as terrorists were firing from higher floors. Shri Param Bir Singh, Addl.CP (ATS) also went inside with QRT and ACP Shri Ghadge but smoke from grenade throwing and continuous firing by terrorists prevented them from seeing much. They could not enter from other sides since fire exits could not be opened from outside. At midnight Shri Singh received a call from DGP Shri A. Roy asking him to go to Express Towers/ NCPA Residence Complex and engage the terrorists from a higher position. He then saw one terrorist walking on the ledge between [the] 18th and 19th floor in order to get access to other locked rooms. The target was about 1,500 metres. He opened fire on him with SLR but the terrorist immediately disappeared. Perhaps this might have saved some lives. Later, on 27th while Shri Singh was on NCPA terrace, terrorists fired on PSI Shri Wakurdekar (ATS) who was with him. The firing came from 18th floor Oberoi. They fired back but could not get angle. Hence he telephoned DGP Shri Roy who promptly contacted the residents of NCPA who allowed the police party to go to the lower floors. Later NSG also came to these floors to join ATS. During these operations, ASI Shri Anil

Mumbai Police are shown on patrol after attacks of Mumbai. The vehicle is a Mahindra Marksman armoured personnel carrier, inducted shortly after the Mumbai terror attacks. (Suyogaerospace)

Bhausaheb Kolhe and Police Naik Shri Ranjit Jagannath Jadhav of SRPF were injured.

3.29 At the same time, Dr. Venkatesham, Addl.CP(S) was supervising anti-terrorist operations from outside to ensure safety of the public who had collected outside, ensuring smooth passage of extra policemen & fire brigades and helping evacuation of injured and hotel guests. Since a large number of places under him were affected (Leopold, Taj, Nariman House, Outside CST) he was busy deputing police forces to all these areas from outside by liaising with Control Room & others. Since it was impossible to confront the terrorists with the forces at his disposal around Trident, he decided to requisition the 'assault teams' located in his region although these assault teams are technically under ATS. One assault team came at 2240 hrs. QRT under PI Sawant also came but they could not advance. He was supervising the arrangements till early morning in addition to briefing NSG. Similarly, Shri Vinay Kargaonkar, Addl. CP (Protection & Security) rushed to the hotel on hearing the explosion outside Trident. Along with a squad of QRT he went inside Trident and saved 17 guests with the help of Oberoi staff. He was also helping Marine Commandos as well as NSG after their arrival. It may be stated that Shri Kargaonkar had already visited Oberoi in the afternoon on 26th along with Sr. PI Marine Drive and Central Security officials from SPG and IB for the PM's Advance Security Liaison for his visit scheduled on 29th at Trident.

3.30 Rear Admiral Pattanaik in his letter to the C.S dated 30 Jan 2009 has stated that Naval Commandos (8) reached Trident at 0200 hrs on 27th. At about 0245 hrs they rushed to the third floor of Trident on hearing firing but the terrorists had shifted their position. They then entered Oberoi side by a side entrance, sighted a terrorist on 9th/10th floor but could not advance since they came under heavy fire/grenade attack. They helped NSG till 1500 hrs in clearing and sanitising floor by floor. He added: 'Non-availability of the layout of the hotel or any assistance from the staff made it difficult for the team to make quick progress'. The Committee also found that the Oberoi security staff were too few in numbers.[11]

Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminal and Cama Hospital

The most severe casualties suffered during the Mumbai attacks were at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminal which was near to Cama hospital. Of the 17 police personnel killed during the attacks, 14 were killed in this sector. Terrorists, Ismail Khan and Ajmal Kasab, were the perpetrators of the carnage. During this phase of the attacks, 58 people were killed and 104 injured. It also showed the courage of some poorly armed or unarmed, police officers against the terrorists and the presence of mind of the railway announcer, Vishnu Dattaram Zende, whose alertness enabled many civilians to evacuate the terminus.

At Cama hospital, the bravery of the staff in blocking the entrances, putting up barricades, and locking the wards, thwarted the attempt to kill patients. Moreover, despite holding some Cama staff as hostage, the terrorists found themselves confronted by a small party of armed police who were able to drive them off, although at considerable cost. It was also here that the Mumbai Police, Anti-Terrorism Squad, under Hemant Karkare, was effectively rendered leaderless when his vehicle, with several senior officers, ran into a terrorist ambush in which all but one of the police officers were killed. However, in the aftermath of that killing, a police roadblock – of which only two to four out of 20 were armed – intercepted the two terrorists and after his armed colleagues killed Ismail Khan, Assistant Sub-Inspector Tukram Gopal Omble, despite being unarmed, tackled Ajmal Kasab and took him prisoner, despite being fatally wounded in the process. Once again, the Pradhan Committee report makes for painful, but important reading:

> 3.31 This sector (CST-Cama sector which continued till Chowpatty) saw the largest number deaths of police officers including Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Home Guards (4 in CST & 10 in Cama-Chowpatty sector). Nine were injured in CST while Cama-Chowpatty sector accounted for 11 injured police officers.
>
> 3.32 The Committee was told that at 2140 hrs two terrorists alighted from a taxi outside the CST building on the long distance main-line station area (Platforms 8–15). They entered a toilet block apparently to take out their lethal weapons. Around 2144 hrs they came out into the large passenger waiting area facing the platforms and started indiscriminate firing from AK-47s and lobbing grenades. One RPF jawan (Shri Murlidhar Laxman Chowdhary) and several passengers waiting for long distance trains were killed. The two terrorists continued advancing towards suburban rail side station area. (Platform Nos 1–7). The two vast waiting areas for suburban trains and the long distance trains are connected by a large canopy that provides entry to either local train stations or long distance trains and on one side is located CST Police Station which looks after law and order and crime along with RPF which is to protect Railway property. By 2202 hours the terrorists reached CST Police station firing their AK-

47s, injuring seriously a number of policemen and killing Home Guard Shri Mukesh Bhikaji Jadhav. However, with great presence of mind and grit, PI Shri Shashank Shinde in charge of the Police Station and his small staff which included PC Shri Pandharkar, resisted the attack on Platform No 7 firing with available carbine and .303 rifles taking cover behind a small structure. But they were totally overwhelmed by the superior fire power of the terrorists. PI Shri Shinde and PC Shri Ambadas Pawar were killed while retaliating. In fact, Shri Ambadas Pawar was not even on duty and belonged to the Mumbai city's Protection Branch. However, on seeing PI Shri Shinde and PC Shri Pandharkar battling with the terrorists he, although off duty, joined the resistance and fired at the terrorists. PC Shri Pandharkar was grievously injured. In all, 9 policemen and Home Guards were injured in the exchange of fire. This stout resistance by the CST police made the terrorists flee from Platform No 7 and going across Platform No 1, they ran down the platform towards a foot over-bridge connecting CST terminal across the main road to a narrow lane adjacent to the Times of India building.

3.33 From then on, the officers in the Control Room (C/R) could not closely track the movements of terrorists or police teams in their pursuit because simultaneous events were happening in that area and senior officers present on the spot were not keeping the C/R informed of their tactical plans. Moreover, the Times of India lane was ill-lighted and in darkness, visibility was poor. Also, because of old stone built buildings along the lane, sound of firing reverberated and echoes of gun shots were heard all over surrounding area, leading to misleading impression about exact location of the two terrorist, despite a large posse of policemen following them.

3.34 Shri Rakesh Maria who was in C/R told the Committee that the conditions were somewhat chaotic as rumours that 60 terrorists had entered the city were circulating. Between 2100 and 0200 [hrs] the C/R received 1,365 public calls of which 267 were terrorism related. The Control Room logs revealed that even among the police, fears that CP's office was being attacked were very strong because the Times of India lane was adjacent to CP's office. One call from a serving police official's wife (residing in nearby Azad Maidan Police Station complex), spoke of firing near her house. Other calls mentioned that GT Hospital and JJ School of Art were being attacked. Those false alarms kept the police in C/R and CP's Office frantically busy.

3.35 The Committee learnt that the 2 terrorists running over the steel-bridge across the main road leading to the JJ Fly-over entered the lane adjoining the Times of India building, occasionally firing shots to intimidate. Although a posse of policemen was chasing them they managed to elude them by firing and injuring two police constables: Shri Murlidhar Chindu Zole and Shri Bandu Balu More of Byculla Police Station who had rushed from neighbouring police stations. A few hundred metres down the lane they seemed to have entered Cama Hospital compound by jumping over the hospital's rear wall. Before doing this, they shot at some huts near Cama Rear Gate No: 3 killing some hutment dwellers (S/Shri Shivshankar Gupta, Thakur Buda Waghela and Bhagwan Gangaram Shinde) On jumping over the wall they killed Cama Hospital Watchman Shri Bhanudev Narkar outside Maternity Hospital side and headed towards the tall building on the opposite side, again killing another watchman Shri Baban Balu Ugade. They then climbed on to the upper floors of this building. (In all the places of attack, whether in Taj, Oberoi, CST, Nariman House or Cama they had tried to climb up and position at higher levels).

3.36 Meanwhile, Shri Sadanand Date, Addl. CP (Central Region) reached Cama Hospital from the front entrance facing the Mahapalika Marg with PSI Prakash Pandurang More (LT Marg P. Stn) whom he met at Metro Junction. Originally he was to go to CST but changed his plans at Metro Junction on learning that terrorists had gone inside the Cama Hospital. Accompanied by six officers and policemen he took the lift to 6th floor. He learnt that terrorists were already on the terrace holding some Cama employees as hostages. He cleverly attracted [the] attention of terrorists to get them down on the landing place of the staircase from the terrace to the sixth floor, facing the lifts. A shoot-out ensued between terrorists and Shri Date's party. Although totally overwhelmed by the superior fire/grenade power of the terrorists who managed to kill PSI More and PC Shri Khandekar and injure all others including Shri Date, he held on to his position by firing at the terrorists from his own revolver and carbine of the injured policemen and getting badly injured in that process. In fact, he guided his Wireless/Operator Shri Sachin Tilekar and other injured to exit from the building. Shri Sachin Tilekar would later report outside Cama rear gate to S/Shri Karkare, Kamte and Salaskar about the plight of Shri Date. On Shri Date being injured – and perhaps thinking that he was dead, the terrorists descended the stairs, adjoining the lifts and ran towards the front gate of Cama on Mahapalika Marg. It would appear that they jumped over the wall and killed PSI B.S. Durgude (ATS) who was regulating the movement of public there.

3.37 During that period of time, according to Shri Rakesh Maria, who was in charge of the Control Room, there were as many as 60 SRP men, Crime Branch Special Team (SOS), QRT, Assault Squad et cetera available at Cama venue (rear side) besides the local police. Thus, there was a large number of force deployed in and around the area. Despite that, this area witnessed large-scale massacre of police officers and men as there was no planned or determined attack against the terrorists outside, except by a small posse of policemen led by PI Shri Thorawade (Azad Maidan) who fired at them from across the other side of the wide Mahapalika Marg with revolvers. The two terrorists, retaliating fire, fled into the adjacent Rang Bhawan Lane (Now called Prof. U.U. Bhatt Marg). Shri Thorawade did not pursue them since their weapons were no match to those of terrorists and they had also run short of ammunition. At Rang Bhawan lane the terrorists faced a Honda car driven by Shri Maruti Madhavrao Phad (driver of a government car) who was taking the vehicle to his officer (Shri Bhushan Gagrani, Secretary, Medical Education) in Mantralaya. The terrorists fired at the car injuring Phad who pressed the central locking system and lay over the driving wheel, with injury on his hand covering his head with blood and feigning to be dead. The terrorists unsuccessfully tried to break open the door of the car apparently with intent to use it for get away. Phad thus escaped certain death due to great presence of mind. Terrorists started walking towards the Rang Bhawan.

3.38 Meanwhile at the Cama rear gate (situated on Prof. U.U. Bhatt Marg, popularly known as Anjuman-E-Islam Lane) a posse of policemen including the late Hemant Karkare, Ashok Kamte and V.S. Salaskar – had fortuitously come together – where they had learnt from Shri Sachin Tilekar W/T operator of Shri Date lying injured (sic) on the 6th floor of Cama. They seemed to have decided to enter the lane leading to the Rang Bhawan apparently with intent to enter the Hospital from the front gate. Since they

> had left their vehicles some distance away from CST, they took over the Qualis in which Shri Shantilal Arjun Bhambre, ACP Pydhonie had arrived at the Cama rear gate between 2345 [and] 0000 [hrs] using the same route that the terrorists a few minutes later were to follow on entering the lane and firing at Phad. S/Shri Karkare, Kamte & Salaskar took ACP Bhambre's Qualis along with his staff (ASI Driver Shri Balasaheb C. Bhosale, PC Jaywant H. Patil and PC/Operator Shri Yogesh S. Patil) without conveying anything to him and drove away towards Mahapalika Marg via Tayyabji Marg & Rang Bhawan. PN Shri Arun Dada Jadhav and PC/Operator Shri Jaywant Patil of Shri Kamte also joined them. Thus, they faced the terrorists who were moving on the same lane from opposite direction. In the subsequent exchange of fire these 3 senior officers and 3 policemen were killed.
>
> 3.39 Shri Arun Dada Jadhav (PN 1642), an aide to PI Shri Salaskar, who travelled in this ill-fated Qualis & was the only one to survive the terrorist attack, corroborated that the decision to go by the Qualis to intercept the terrorists from the front side of Cama Hospital entrance was sudden. Obviously they did not know that by that time the terrorists had left Cama and were in the same lane, facing them from opposite direction. Within a few metres of their entry in the lane, they were ambushed by the terrorists who were hiding in front of the Corporate Bank's ATM outlet. After killing the officers and men, Qualis was then taken over and driven by the terrorists past the Metro Junction, firing and killing PC Shri Arun Raghunath Chitte on way and rushing towards Nariman Point area, chased by the police. They abandoned that vehicle near the Council Hall, from where they hijacked a Skoda, until they were tackled by ASI Shri Tukaram Gopal Omble and his team bravely at Chowpatty. The lone survivor in the Qualis, Jadhav, acted with exceptional presence of mind and but for his telling, the getaway of the two terrorists in a Honda-City (it was actually a Skoda) the two could have merrily continued with their killing spree.[12]

Nariman House

The final target for the terrorists was Chabad Lubavitch Jewish centre in Colaba located at Nariman house. Here, two terrorists murdered Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka Holtzberg, along with four other hostages, hoping that Jewish deaths would create a greater furore. Nine hostages were rescued by the NSG and the police. In an extraordinary act of bravery, Sandra Samuel, the nanny for the Holtzberg's two-year-old son Moshe, managed to escape with the boy after his parents had been killed.

In this case, despite being outgunned, the police were able to contain the terrorists and prevent their planned escape. Whilst unable to save the lives of the Rabbi, his wife and the four other civilians, once again, despite initially being outgunned, the police were able to effectively prevent additional casualties. The work of Assistant Commissioner of Police Issaq Bagwan came in for special praise from the Pradhan Committee:

> 41. Here the situation was handled almost single-handedly by Shri Issaq Ibrahim Bagwan, ACP Azad Maidan division who deserves high praise in containing the terrorists, keeping them pinned down until NSG came on 27th afternoon. He originally was to have gone to Leopold Café but found that the killing had already taken place there and police were removing the injured to the hospital. There he heard an explosion in Colaba Market area. He initially faced a problem in not being able to locate the target building since none in the locality knew anything about the significance of Nariman House. It was only after reaching the spot that he came to know that Jews were staying there. There were no policemen there from Colaba since they were busy elsewhere. After he reached there, MRA Mobile-1 came. (ASI Shri Shinde with 2 PCs with SLRs). At 2330 hrs SRP (striking mobile) came. With their help he cordoned off the area and moved out at least 300 people from the surrounding buildings. He deployed his policemen on the neighbouring buildings (Prem Court, Lalji Terrace etc) and started shooting at terrorists. Although they could not see the terrorists (since the building inside was dark) they wanted to pin them down. On 27th at about 0800 [hrs] an ayah (Sandra) ran outside with a baby followed by a servant. ACP Shri Bagwan then ordered his men to fire tear gas shells into the House. The terrorists closed the curtains. Continuous exchange of fire was going on between them & terrorists till NSG came in at 1600 hrs on 28th and started their operations. NSG used the same nearby buildings which he had used. The Committee finds that ACP Shri Bagwan had acted with great presence of mind in pinning down terrorists and saving lives almost single-handed.[13]

Ajmal Kasab at CST at the start of his killing spree. The image was taken by the Chhatrapati railway station's internal circuit cameras. (PTI)

The aftermath of Kasab's killing spree at CST. The series of attacks killed 175 people, including nine attackers. (PTI)

At the end of that first terrible night, the police with assistance from the Army and Marine Commandos, had been able to contain the terrorists but, despite being able to rescue many hostages, were unable to eliminate the threat. The police response was undoubtedly inadequate and the basic strategy seemed to be to wait for the elite commandos of the NSGs.

The NSG and Operation Black Tornado

The NSG is a force which draws personnel from the army and the CAPFs and forms India's elite counter-terrorism unit. Its history dates back to the bloody 1984 storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, in the aftermath of which:

> The Union Cabinet in 1984 took a decision to create a Federal Contingency Force comprising of personnel who are highly motivated, specially equipped and well-trained to tackle the various manifestations of terrorism. In June 1984, a nucleus consisting of the Director General of NSG and other essential elements were sanctioned and steps were initiated to raise the Force. A bill for creation of this Organisation was introduced in the parliament in August 1986 and it received the assent of the President on September 22, 1986, and the NSG formally came into being from that date.
>
> The basic philosophy of NSG is swift and speedy strike and immediate withdrawal from the theatre of action. NSG has been given the SPECIFIC ROLE to handle all facets of terrorism in any part of the country as a Federal Contingency Force. The NSG was modelled on the pattern of the SAS of the UK and GSG-9 of Germany. It is a task-oriented Force and has two complementary elements in the form of the Special Action Group (SAG) comprising Army personnel and the SRG, comprising personnel drawn from the Central Armed Police Forces / State Police Forces.[14]

The force had its real baptism of fire during Operation Black Thunder 2 when, in 1988, it was able to neutralise a terrorist threat and rescue hostages held by Sikh terrorists who had once again, reoccupied the Golden Temple. After that incident, the force had some relatively minor operations, the largest of which was its 2002 operation to neutralise two terrorists who had attacked the Akshardham temple complex in Gujarat. One NSG commando was killed in this operation. In these operations, the NSG had to contend with a relatively simple situation – terrorists and hostages were in a small area with few rooms. Mumbai 2008 would be very different and would present challenges completely outside the force's experience, requiring them to improvise and thereby, take significant risks.

The NSG became known as the 'Black Cats' for its distinctive black fatigues and was, between 1986 and the early 1990s, lavished with the best equipment that could be procured including MP5 submachine guns, PSG-1 sniper rifles and the best body armour and other protective gear available for purchase. However, until then to 2008, the force had seen little by way of improvement in its equipment with some additional night-vision equipment and SiG-551/553 rifles being procured. This meant that when called to action in 2008, the force was not as well-equipped as it otherwise might have been, although it was vastly better trained, equipped and oriented than any other force in India for the job that it was asked to undertake.

The headquarters of the NSG (and in 2008, its only base) was at Manesar in Haryana, with an administrative site at Palam, New Delhi. The NSG was and is, divided into two principal operational groups – the Special Action Group (drawn from the Army) and the Special Ranger Group (drawn from the CAPFs).

The NSG also maintains India's National Bomb Data Centre, which monitors, records and analyses all bomb explosions in India whilst also studying similar incidents worldwide. In addition, there is an Electronic Support Group which provides communication, SIGNIT and ELINT support to the NSG, working closely with the IB and R&AW. To bolster its knowledge base, the NSG tried to draw as many lessons as possible from similar forces around the world and those on deputation from the Army, had experience of working with international forces.

The total strength of the NSG in 2008 was about 5,000 personnel, divided into various operational groups and sub-groups but the two main operational groups were the SAG and SRG.

The NSG has two operational SAGs – 51 and 52 SAG. These, constitute the core of the Counter Terrorism Task Force (CTTF), which is the counter-terrorism arm of the NSG. 51 SAG is primarily tasked for counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations with 52 SAG being assigned to anti-hijacking operations. Both are able to function in the hostage rescue role but have their respective specialties. The SAG is the primary arm of the CTTF and comprises the best trained, best equipped and most capable element within the NSG. A disproportionate number of those on deputation from the Army are from the Army's Parachute Brigade and Para (SF) battalions and as such, bring with them a high level of expertise which is further refined through NSG training.

The NSG has three SRG – 11, 12 and 13. Of these, 11 SRG was, even in 2008, under the CTTF and as such, is deployed entirely

NATIONAL SECURITY GUARD

NSG commandos demonstrating their capabilities at a ceremony in the Mumbai international airport area in 2015. (Sachin Rao)

for counter-terrorist operations along with 51 SAG and 52 SAG, primarily with the former. In the past, 12 and 13 SRGs were deployed for a plethora of tasks, including VIP security. However, after 2014, these were withdrawn from VIP duty and reassigned to the CTTF. Their VIP duties were reassigned to the CISF. The SRG personnel, though highly capable, is assigned to support duties as part of the CTTF. The main task is to provide a secure perimeter with sniper support for the SAG.

One major weakness of the NSG was its lack of integral air support – being reliant on the IAF for its transport requirements. In 2008, the NSG did not have any helicopters assigned for its use to get from Manesar to the airport at Palam, leading to reliance on the traffic-prone roads leading into and within, New Delhi. However, at Palam, at least one Il-76 transport was kept ready for the use of the NSG. The NSG, when it arrived at any incident site, was entirely dependent on transport provided by local authorities. This led to the bizarre spectacle of NSG teams being transported through Mumbai under terrorist attack, in bright red buses, unprotected by armour, and in full glare of the public and media.

Called to Action – Black Tornado is Launched

The NSG's Colonel Sunil Sheoran of 51 SAG which included NSG's CTTF-1 (a self-contained unit of 150 personnel including a squadron of commandos and bomb disposal and support elements), were placed on alert regarding a possible hostage situation in Mumbai even as they watched the incident unfold on television. The three squadrons of 51 SAG – each with 100 personnel, were brought to readiness. One squadron, led by Major Kandwal and the rest of CIFT-1 was ready to roll out within 30 minutes. At 2300 hrs, on 26 November 2008, the NSG went on full alert.[15]

An hour later, the formal request for the force was issued and CTTF-1 was ready to move along with half a squadron of commandos from CTTF-2. A convoy of 40 unmarked vehicles carrying some 200 commandos rolled out at 0054 hrs on 27 November and headed into Delhi, en route to Palam airport. They were delayed by heavy traffic and the obstreperous nature of some toll booth attendants on a highway who had to be persuaded to open the toll gates, in not so gentle terms.[16]

Finally, a little before 0200 hrs, the commandos arrived at the airport and began to embark aboard the Il-76 kept on alert for their use. There was a somewhat unnecessary delay when India's then Home Minister, the much ridiculed, reviled and mocked Shivraj Patil, decided to accompany the commandos. The flight finally took off at 0300 hrs for a two hour flight to Mumbai.[17]

Briefing his troops en route to Mumbai, Sheoran realised that the terrorists not only had a six hour head start over the NSG but they were evidently much more familiar with the layouts of the two hotels. This latter point was to prove a major problem for the NSG as they grappled with an unfamiliar layout and an unprecedented scenario – a worrying combination of large numbers of hostages, potential hostages and rooms, plus highly motivated, trained and well-armed terrorists. The long delay, through no fault of the NSG or even the government, did not help nor did the evident political pressure.

The commandos arrived at 0500 hrs on 27 November and the 200 men of CTTF-1 and CTTF-2 were transported into Mumbai in 20 red BEST buses escorted by the Mumbai police. They were cheered on by the citizens of Mumbai who had quickly gone from scared to enraged at the effrontery of the terrorists. The NSG commandos were fully armed, kitted out in body armour and old 1980s vintage but still effective, Romer steel helmets but were as yet, uncertain as to how they were to conduct their operation. Their commanders, Sheoran in particular, were getting a detailed briefing from Mumbai's police leadership.[18]

This briefing was only partly satisfactory. The Mumbai police were themselves, short of intelligence and their assessment of the ongoing crisis was still incomplete. Rakesh Maria, one of Mumbai's most able senior officers, had not even interrogated Ajmal Kasab at that point, which meant that his knowledge of the terrorists' plans was very incomplete. The Mumbai police were, however, to brief the NSG about the three unfolding hostage situations – at the Taj and Oberoi hotels and at Nariman House. It is indicative of the scale of the challenge facing the NSG that the hotels were given priority over Nariman House.

With minimal tactical intelligence, the NSG arrived at the Taj and Oberoi hotels. The scale of the task before them was terrifying. The Taj had no fewer than 1,100 rooms with over 3,000 guests. The Oberoi had 320 but fortunately, only half had been occupied and of those, guests seem to have been found in only 25 rooms. This greatly simplified the task for the commandos assigned to the Oberoi but nonetheless, a lack of familiarity with the layout, a large number of potential hostages and two well-armed terrorists, were to prove to be daunting challenges for the NSG commandos.[19]

Supporting the NSG were sharpshooters from the Navy's MARCOS with Dragunov designated marksman rifles and a small army contingent which was able to provide fire support with AGS-30 automatic grenade launchers, machine guns and Carl Gustav rocket launchers. In addition, the NSG was able to call on the assistance of a detachment from the CRPF. This proved to be of little practical help because of their lack of training for the task, despite their willingness to assist and take risks. However, the Mumbai Fire Brigade was to prove invaluable. Not only did its personnel brave gunfire to extinguish fires and rescue people, but they also allowed their platforms to be used by the NSG for its snipers.[20]

The NSG took the decision not to rely on either the MARCOS or to place much reliance on the CRPF owing to differences in training and engagement protocols. The Mumbai police were not going to be of much help in hunting the terrorists and as such were, along with the other forces, assigned to perimeter security around the hotels. It was deemed prudent to leave the entire operation to the NSG and this meant, that at 0930 hrs on 27 November 2008, the NSG took command of the operation.[21]

The Taj

To say that the operation undertaken at the Taj was challenging would be a grotesque understatement. The complex was so large that two task forces – Task Force Palace under Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan and Task Force Tower under Major Kandwal, had to be formed.[22] These teams were then faced with the daunting task of clearing some 1,100 rooms, with 80 percent occupancy and possibly, as many as 3,000 guests. The efforts of the MARCOS, the police and Mumbai Fire Brigade, facilitated the rescue of many but both NSG task forces were under no illusions as to the scale of their task.

Throughout the afternoon of the 27 November 2008, Task Forces Palace and Tower began a slow sweep of the hotel, encountering gruesome evidence of the massacre of guests at the hotel's restaurants. One room at a time, they progressed through the hotel, rescuing hostages as they went. However, at 1800 hrs, in room 402, Task Force Palace contacted the terrorists.[23]

In a cat and mouse game, the terrorists fled, leaving behind burning rooms and dead hostages while the NSG team sought to pursue and contain them. This led to a series of running gun battles, interspersed with prolonged periods of relative calm. It was evident that the terrorists had better knowledge of the building than the commandos did but neither NSG task force was anything other than thorough in its primary task of rescuing hostages. Each floor was systematically cleared and a team of five commandos assigned to escort the guests to safety. In this way, the NSG was able to evacuate some 300 guests, adding to those who escaped on their own, those who were rescued by the MARCOS and Fire Brigade.[24]

As Task Force Palace proceeded to clear each room, they became increasingly vulnerable to ambush. This was particularly the case as they proceeded up staircases, in the dark and with numerous hiding places available to the terrorists. At 0100 hrs on 28 November 2008, the task force re-established contact with the terrorists when they were ambushed as they emerged from a stairway. Grenades were hurled at the team and there was a heavy exchange of gunfire. In this fight, while attempting to outflank the terrorists, Major Unnikrishnan was killed. His body was not recovered until 0930 hrs.[25]

By 1100 hrs on 28 November 2008, the hotel was finally deemed clear of civilians. This enabled the NSG teams to shift their plans towards containing and killing the terrorists. This was to prove a most difficult task as the terrorists made good use of IEDs to delay and otherwise hamper the commandos as they sought to establish and maintain contact. Heavy fighting took place around the Taj's Wasabi restaurant with a booby-trapped refrigerator being discovered. The four terrorists chose to make their last stand in this part of the Taj Palace wing of the hotel.[26]

Using a combination of a borrowed AGS-30 automatic grenade launcher, sniper fire and from 1800 hrs, halogen lights from the Fire Brigade, the NSG sought to flush the terrorists out of their hiding places, with a lack of success. The heavy furniture of the restaurant provided good defensive cover for the terrorists but they had not factored in the effects that a combination of firefight, grenades and an ample supply of alcohol, would cause. By 0600 hrs on 29 November 2008, the restaurant was on fire.[27]

As the terrorists tried to escape the flames through windows, the commandos, now led by Colonel Sheoran in person, hurled grenades at them, cutting off their escape and then systematically hunting them down and killing them as they tried to flee. By 0700 hrs, the restaurant was engulfed in flames and the Fire Brigade spent much effort in extinguishing it.[28]

By 0800 hrs on 29 November 2008, the Taj was deemed to be secure.

The Oberoi

Compared to the Taj, the NSG operation at the Oberoi was somewhat simpler but once again plagued by a severe lack of intelligence. The team earmarked for the Oberoi was led by Major B. Bharath, CO of the 51 SAG's third squadron. Once Bharath assessed the situation, he indicated to his superior, Colonel Rathee, that he would be successful but he required time and could not be rushed. Colonel Rathee gave him complete freedom of action and even when an Indian General tried to get him to pin down a time when the operation would be finished, Bharath stood his ground and continued to operate as he saw fit. He was proved right.[29]

Bharath's team took charge at about 0900 hrs on 27 November 2008. He was provided with invaluable assistance from an assistant chief security officer from the Oberoi, Rajesh Kadam. Despite being unarmed, and understandably concerned, Kadam went along with the commandos. In the meantime, the Oberoi's security was able, using a telephone message, to ascertain how many rooms were occupied. This meant that the commandos, while still having to check all 320 rooms, were able to operate with a bit more freedom. In the end, it was established that some 25 rooms were then occupied.[30]

As the NSG teams moved into position, with a sniper unit in support from an adjacent tower, they moved along the Oberoi's fire escape stairway and encountered evidence that the terrorists had used the fire escape to hunt for civilians to murder. As they moved through the hotel itself, they began clearing one room at a time and shepherding the guests into a safe room which they locked and secured. As the fire escape was secured, the commandos evacuated the guests. Moving slowly from the 21st floor downwards, the commandos found evidence of systematic slaughter of guests by the terrorists.[31]

It was on the 18th floor that the terrorists were found. Fahadullah and Abdul Rehman opened fire on the NSG team and hurled grenades, injuring some of the commandos. Despite having an excellent field of fire, with no restrictions, this part of the NSG team was able to corner the terrorists while allowing the rest to evacuate guests and to secure the rest of the hotel. At this time, Bharath was asked if his seniors could report that the operation would be over by 1900 hrs. His response was that it might take two days, not two hours.[32]

Running low on ammunition and increasingly under pressure from the commandos and their supporting snipers, the two terrorists communicated with their handlers in Pakistan who bolstered their morale with a call to kill 'unbelievers' and die as martyrs. At 0230 hrs on 28 November 2008, Fahadullah was killed by the commandos. It

NSG Commandos resting in at the Taj Mahal Palace. (PTI)

was not until 0700 hrs, however, that the NSG had realised that it had killed Abdul Rehman sometime earlier.

After room clearing operations and sanitising the area for explosives, the bodies of the murdered guests were brought out by 1630 hrs and the operation was deemed completed by 1830 hrs on 28 November 2008.[33] Some 250 hostages had been rescued and the terrorists neutralised.

Nariman House

The task of neutralising the terrorists and rescuing what hostages they could from Nariman house, was assigned to CTTF 2 with some 148 personnel. CTTF 2, under the de facto command of Colonel Sudeep Sen, was very much the poor relation of CTTF 1 and had many personnel still undergoing NSG training. CTTF 2 was, at the time, a reserve unit and had to rely on equipment scraped together for the operation, the best going to CTTF 1, already engaged at the Taj and Oberoi. This meant that CTTF 2 went into action with subpar helmets and minimal night-vision gear.[34]

CTTF 2 left Palam at about 1000 hrs on 27 November 2008 and arrived on an IAF Il-76 at 1200 hrs in Mumbai. By 1500 hrs, they were briefed on their assignment at Nariman house. The target was a challenging one as it had no fewer than five entry and exit points and its windows were heavily protected. It was then decided that a roof entry, using a helicopter insertion, would be undertaken.[35]

The NSG also noted large crowds had gathered, only loosely controlled by police and CAPF personnel. It should be stated that aggressive stone pelting by the local civilians of the area played a key role in containing the terrorists stationed at Nariman house.

The NSG team established its perimeter and sniper support locations by 1830 hrs on 27 November 11 and by 2130 hrs, a five-man team probed for an entrance, coming under heavy fire. At 2200 hrs, Indian intelligence intercepted a conversation between Sajid Mir and terrorist Babar Imran which revealed the murder of hostages but at that point, the NSG was not in a position to intervene.[36]

The operation against the terrorists began at 0730 hrs 28 November 2008. An IAF Mi-17 picked up the NSG assault force under Major Manish and proceed to insert them onto the roof of Nariman house, all the while snipers and other commandos engaged the terrorists from adjacent buildings. As they proceeded room by room, they encountered the bodies of murdered hostages but their real challenge was the narrow staircases which they had to traverse and the number of ambush points. In this way, one NSG commando, Gajender Singh Bisht was killed.[37] The NSG was able to rescue some 60 hostages from 12 families in and around Nariman House.

After a vicious firefight between the terrorists and the commandos, the team, at about 1700 hrs, was able to begin its final assault. Using explosives to breach the doors protecting the terrorists, the NSG was finally able to neutralise the terrorists at Nariman house shortly thereafter.[38]

Overall, it took nearly three days for the Mumbai terrorists to be eventually neutralised. The citizens of Mumbai, and India in general, were angry and waited to see what the reaction would be.

Reaction to the Mumbai Attacks

It is a little-known fact that shortly after the Mumbai attacks, and once it became clear that Pakistan had planned, prepared and perpetrated the Mumbai terror attacks, India's military tried to offer the government – the INC led UPA – options to strike back at the LeT's terrorist camps. Air Chief Marshal Fali Major, then the Chief of Air Staff, indicated that the IAF was prepared to strike LeT training camps and bases in POK. The government rejected the option.[39]

Having decided against a military response, India decided on a combination of diplomatic and political pressure to force action from Pakistan against these groups. Pakistan initially denied the involvement of Pakistanis but in the face of overwhelming evidence that all of the attackers were Pakistanis, adopted a policy of demanding 'evidence' from India. This resulted in a series of dossiers being sent to Pakistan which, despite being extremely thorough, were dismissed as inadequate by the Pakistani authorities. Furthermore, the charade of 'arrest and release' began whereby terrorists would be arrested, charged and then either acquitted or released without charge by the Pakistan government. Only when Pakistan ended up on the FATF 'grey list' in 2019, did it make some efforts to arrest LeT and JUM leaders.

However, the most recent example exposed Pakistani duplicity when Sajid Mir, the mastermind of the 26 November Mumbai attacks, and previously declared 'dead' by Pakistan, was suddenly found alive and subsequently arrested.[40] When Pakistan is removed from the 'grey list', India expects these terrorists to be released and attacks to resume.

The response from the international community was initially very helpful with the United States providing FBI assistance to help Indian investigators and the UK sent some 15 forensic investigators. Subsequently, the Americans were able to arrest the LeT operative David Headley but promised that he would not be extradited to India.

He remains in US custody. However, India was increasingly disappointed with attitudes to Pakistan from the US, the UK and

NSG and CRPF outside the Oberoi luxury hotel. (PTI)

Italy in particular, were equivocal and the strong impression came across to Indians that Indian lives were unimportant compared to placating Pakistan. To date it is galling to India that terrorist groups have fundraising proxies in Europe, the UK and the US.

It should also be noted that the sole surviving terrorist, Ajmal Kasab, was hanged in 2012 after a trial which was freely and fairly conducted and covered. However, even then, mercy petitions and apologists from Pakistan sought mercy for him.

Economically, India did very little beyond token measures against Pakistan. Even more than the lack of a military response, the lack of any punitive measures of any value against Pakistan proved to be problematic for the Indian government. The UPA was increasingly branded as being 'soft' on Pakistan and whilst re-elected in 2009, it was increasingly tarred with that reputation.

This came to a head when, after winning a second term in government, Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, sought a compromise and rapprochement with Pakistan through the Sharm-El-Sheik joint statement of July 2009. This statement proved to be the death-knell for Dr Singh's credibility as soon after, even his own party repudiated the statement.

In the end, the India's external response to the Mumbai terrorist attacks was highly unsatisfactory. However, this was certainly not the case for its internal response as the country took many of the lessons from the Mumbai attack to heart.

India's Internal Response

It would be entirely wrong to suggest that India did nothing in response to the Mumbai terror attacks of 26 November 2008. It is correct to note, as above, that it adopted a largely unsatisfactory diplomatic and political approach to confronting Pakistan's terrorist challenge. However, it is also the case that the country made significant improvements in its internal security structure which saw the creation of new hubs for the NSG and improvements to coastal security. There was also an acceleration to re-equip the police with new weapons and improved training, with several cities creating new anti-terrorism squads to respond to similar incidents in the future.

As noted earlier, the NSG was handicapped in responding quickly to the Mumbai attacks because of its location at Manesar. Traffic, the need to airlift the NSG commandos and their equipment, all contributed to an excessively long response time. To rectify this, the NSG began to increase its strength, through additional deputation from the Army and CAPFs, to reach a strength of over 10,000 personnel. These additional personnel were used to form a new series of regional hubs, each with 460 commandos permanently assigned to them in five Special Composite Groups (SCGs). These five regional hubs and their assigned SCGs are located at:[41]

- 26 SCG Mumbai
- 27 SCG Chennai
- 28 SCG Hyderabad
- 29 SCG Kolkata
- 30 SCG Gandhinagar

NSG and CRPF personnel approach their target. (PTI)

An IAF Mi-17 helicopter inserts NSG commandos at Nariman House. With its reputation for being robust and versatile, the Mi-17, which was derived from the Mi-8, serves in many countries around the world. (PTI)

These hubs, located at some of India's major cities and also within reach of airports, enable the NSG to establish a presence at the scene of any incident in a much faster time than before.

One of the biggest changes to the Indian security system in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, was the huge improvement in the Coastal Security network. A chain of coastal radars was installed as a matter of priority. The Indian Coast Guard, bolstered with new inductions of vessels, took overall control of the coastal security system, coordinating with a revitalised marine police force that had been raised in coastal states with extensive help from the Central government. This improved coordination has paid rich dividends, as there has been a noticeable improvement in India's coastal security in subsequent years. The Coast Guard defined its role and place as follows:

After the Mumbai attacks in 2008, there has been a paradigm shift in the maritime security apparatus that increased emphasis on surveillance, intelligence gathering and information sharing amongst the various stakeholders to ensure an effective response to any emerging situation. In Feb 2009, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) was additionally designated as the authority responsible for coastal security in territorial waters, including areas to be patrolled by the Coastal Police. The Coast Guard is also responsible for overall coordination between Central and State agencies in matters relating to Coastal Security.

> As part of Coastal Security mechanism, a surveillance system, called Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN), comprising of Chain of Static Sensors having Radars, Automatic Identification System (AIS), Day/Night Cameras and Met Sensors at 46 locations along the coastline and Islands has been established by the Indian Coast Guard. In order to achieve near gap-free surveillance of the entire coastline, 38 additional Radar Stations and 08 Mobile Surveillance Systems apart from VTMS connectivity at Gulf of Kutch and Gulf of Khambat, are being installed under CSN phase-II.
>
> The ICG has promulgated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for ensuring coordination and cohesion amongst various agencies involved in Coastal Security. Regular exercises are conducted to validate these SOPs. To revalidate the coastal security mechanism and bring awareness among the fishermen at sea, regular boarding operations are also being conducted to validate and check the credentials of the occupants of the vessels including their Identity Cards and Registration Documents. Based on intelligence inputs, Coastal Security operations are conducted by the ICG in coordination with other stake holders.[42]

However, whilst the Coast Guard took control of the coordination of efforts and was, as noted, bolstered in strength, the real progress was in establishing an effective

NSG commandos engaging terrorists at Nariman House. The building was attacked during the November 2008 Mumbai attacks and six of its occupants, including Rivka Holtzberg and his wife who was six months pregnant, were killed. (PTI) network of marine police stations with boats and vehicles. This was done in two phases – phase 1, predates the Mumbai attacks and achieved the following:

> Coastal States/UTs were provided with 73 Coastal Police Stations, 97 Check posts, 58 Outposts and 30 Barracks equipped with 204 boats, 153 Four Wheelers, 312 Motorcycles and 10 Rubber Inflatable Boats. 204 boats have been procured centrally by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Construction work of Coastal Police Stations, barracks, check posts, outposts and procurement of vehicles has been done by Coastal States/UTs. Further, a lump sum assistance of `10 lakhs per Coastal Police Station was also given for computers and equipments et cetera[43]

After 26 November, however, there was a renewed push to complete phase-1 and quickly move to complete a second phase. As the Indian Parliament noted, ‘Subsequent to the Mumbai incident on 26 November, the coastal security arrangements have been thoroughly reviewed by the Government of India. Several important decisions were taken, some of which are given’:’[44]

> The coastal States/UTs were asked to carry out a vulnerability/gap analysis in consultation with the Coast Guard to firm up their additional requirements for formulation of Phase-II Scheme of the Coastal Security. After getting detailed proposals from the coastal States/UTs, the Coastal Security Scheme (Phase-II) has been approved.
>
> The scheme is being implemented over a period of five years starting from April 2011 with a total financial outlay of `1579.91 crore, (`1154.91 crore for nonrecurring expenditure and `425 crore for recurring expenditure) through 9 coastal States and 4 UTs. The details of approved components under the Scheme are given in Table 5

Table 5 Components under Coastal Security Scheme – II

		Boats/Vessels					
	Name of State/UT	**Coastal Police Stations**	**12 Ton**	**Others**	**Number of Jetties**	**Four Wheelers**	**Motorcycles**
1	Gujarat	12	21	10 (5 Ton)	5	12	24
2	Maharashtra	7	14	-	3	7	14
3	Goa	4	4	-	2	4	8
4	Karnataka	4	12	-	2	4	8
5	Kerala	10	20	-	4	10	20
6	Tamil Nadu	30	-	20 (19 Mtr)	12	30	60
7	Andhra Pradesh	15	30	-	7	15	30
8	Odisha	13	26	-	5	13	26
9	West Bengal	8	7	-	4	8	16
10	Daman & Diu	2	4	-	2	2	4
11	Lakshadweep	3	6	12**	2	3	6
12	Puducherry	3	6	-	2	3	6
13	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	20# ***10 MPOCS	-	10* 23**	10	20	20
	TOTAL	131	150	75	60	131	242

* LV – Large Vessels ** RIB – Rigid Inflatable Boats

*** Marine Police Operational Centres # Existing 20 Coastal Police Stations will be upgraded

> Since November 2008, several initiatives have been taken by the Government to strengthen security of the coastal areas against threat of non-state actors from the sea. One of the most significant achievements has been the integration of all maritime stakeholders, including several State and Central agencies into the new coastal security mechanism. Indian Navy has established four Joint Operations Centres (JOC) at Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi and Port Blair. As a result of this, there is good coordination, synergy and understanding between all agencies. All coastal security operations are now coordinated from the Joint Operations Centre, which are manned round the clock by Naval and Coast Guard teams. In addition, the State Marine Police and other agencies such as Customs, Intelligence Bureau and Ports et cetera are also networked with these centres’.

These are substantial developments and they took some considerable time to complete. However, the effort, the expenditure and the priority given to coastal security is indicative of the impact of 26 November.

In addition, many Indian governments began a series of major reviews of their police forces in light of the apparent ineffectiveness in the response of the Mumbai Police. The Pradhan committee report was eye-opening.

Analysing the Mumbai Police’s Ineffectiveness in Responding[45]

That the police response was inadequate and ineffective in the initial stages of the Mumbai attacks, is undeniable. According to press reports, the Mumbai Police mustered strength of some 42,000 at the time of the Mumbai attacks. According to the *Times of India*, the strength was as follows:

- Total personnel: 42,000
- Number of police stations: 86
- Other measures: CCTVs installed, BEST buses, major railway stations (CST, Churchgate, Dadar, Bandra, Andheri, Borivali, Wadala, Mumbai Central), all major malls and multiplexes secured
- Annual Budget: Rs 700 crore
- Number of vehicles: 1,500
- Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) personnel: 450
- ATS year of formation: 2003

- ATS located at 1 police station and 8 units spread across the state armed with Glock pistols and AK-47s

Mumbai's vaunted ATS which valiantly attempted to spearhead the city's response to the vicious assault, was never intended to be a Quick Reaction Team operating against heavily armed terrorists. Indeed, the Mumbai Police's own website gives the following description of the mandate of the ATS:[46]

- Created by the Government of Maharashtra, vide G.R. No. SAS-10/03/15/SB-IV, dated 8 July 2004. To get information about anti-national elements working in any part of Maharashtra.
- To coordinate with Central information agencies, like IB, RAW and exchange information with them.
- To coordinate with similar agencies of other States.
- To track and eliminate activities of mafia and other organised crime syndicates. To detect rackets of counterfeit currency notes and smuggling narcotic substances.

In attempting to handle the situation that arose on 26 November 2008, the Mumbai ATS found itself out of its league. It was comprehensively out-thought and outgunned, losing several valiant officers to the terrorists. At one time, Mumbai, with much fanfare, deployed 200 motorcycle mounted commandos. Armed with 9mm pistols and carbines and dressed in distinctive blue uniforms, this unit was supposed to be the city's answer to both terror and underworld violence.

Unfortunately, the unit did not live up to expectations and after operating for a few years, faded from view and from service. Deployment was abysmal with the unit being squandered by piecemeal deployment of one team of two commandos and one motorcycle, to each police station and grotesquely misused; performing such tasks as guarding banks and jewellery stores. Indeed, as the Pradhan Committee report, commissioned by the Maharashtra government in the aftermath of the 26 November attacks noted:

> 64. The Committee was briefed that in the 1990s Special Motor Cycle borne commandos in 'buddy pairs' were raised and trained to deal with violent 'under world' crimes and for immediate response to terrorist strikes within the city. Government, vide the G.R. dated 11/2/2000, had created 100 flying squads of two commandos each, for all the Commissionerates in the State of which Mumbai was allotted 46 flying squads, which is 92 policemen with 40 motor cycles. They were trained for three months in Karate, handling of wireless sets, rescue of captives, handling of weapons such as AK-47, SLR, Carbines, 9mm pistols et cetera The Committee was informed that presently 58 commandos are working under Assistant Commissioner of Police, Armed Police, Marol. While most are deployed at various sensitive places only 10 to 15 are available for any emergency duty. The Committee did not find that they had any role on 26 November.[47]

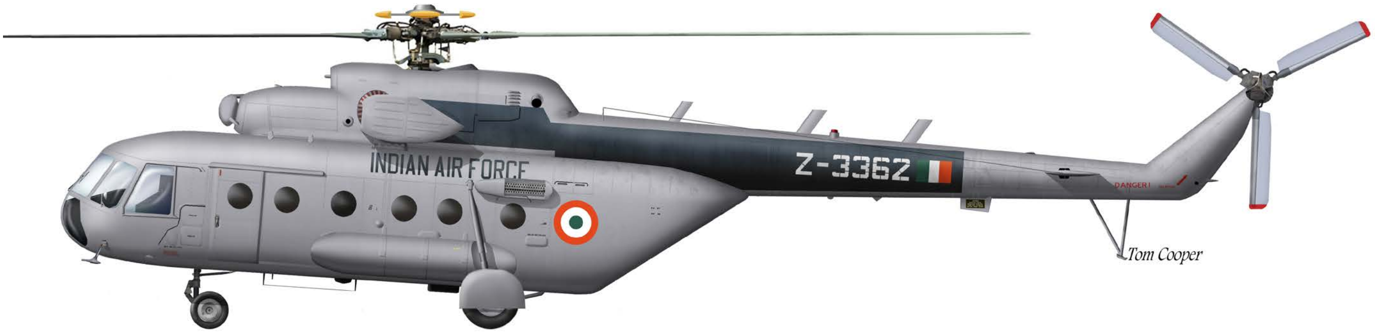
The location of the spot where police officers Hemant Karkare, Ashok Kamte and Vijay Salaskar were gunned down by terrorists during the November 2008 Mumbai attacks. (Nichalp)

One of the problems that students of Indian Police forces face, is that the word 'commando' is thrown around rather liberally. The word implies a degree of specialised training and skill beyond that normally expected from simply, an armed police unit. Mumbai created a unit called the 'Assault Mobiles' prior to the attacks but these were singularly ineffective:

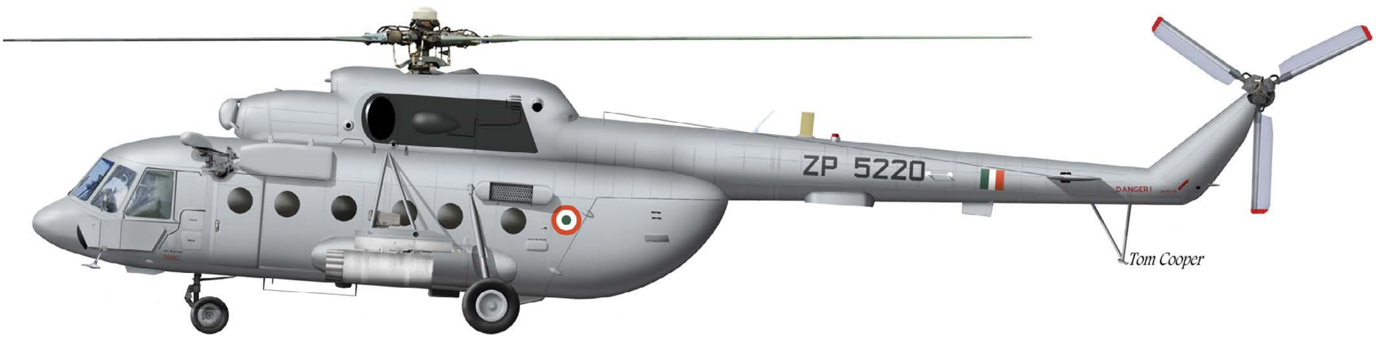
> 3.65 Another Anti-terrorist weapon in the hands of Mumbai police (ATS) is the 'Assault Mobiles' located at 7 vital spots in the city. These are teams each of one PSI, and five men armed with one 9mm pistol, one AK-47, one SLR and one Carbine with adequate ammunition. They also have six bullet proof jackets. ATS informed us on 17/2/2009 that these policemen are given 'all weapons' training for a period of seven days, given practice of dismantling and handling of weapons and given simulator firing practice once in a month. They wear regular Mumbai police uniform and [are] posted for a period of one year only in 'assault mobiles'.

In other words, these men are nothing more than the armed police who cannot be effective in dealing with a live terrorist situation as on 26 November 2008.

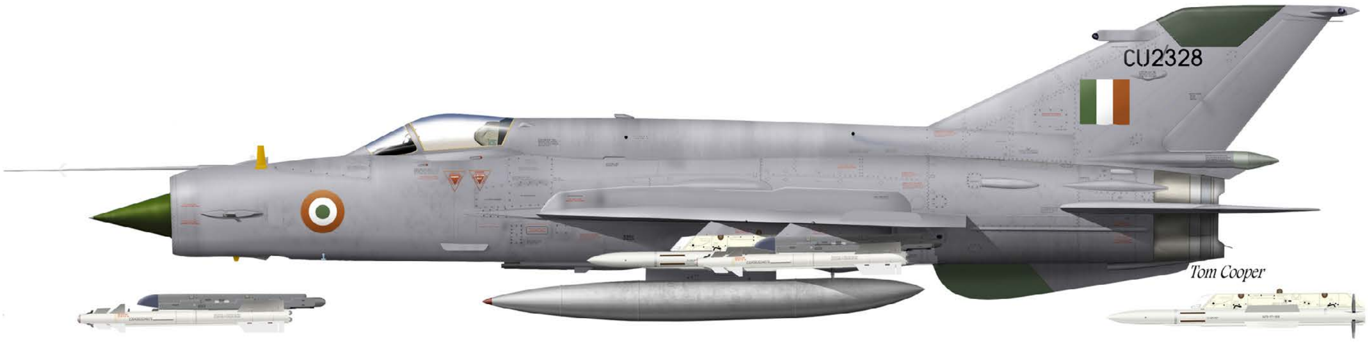
> 3.66 The Committee's enquiries revealed that another set of commandos was trained early in the 1990s originally for anti-terrorist operations and for crime control. This unit is now called SOS (Special Operations Squad) attached to the Detection of Crime Branch, CID, Mumbai and comprises 15 officers, 22 men and 4 drivers. Each officer/man carries either an AK-47 rifle or SLR or pistol each. However, this strength is not used for assault



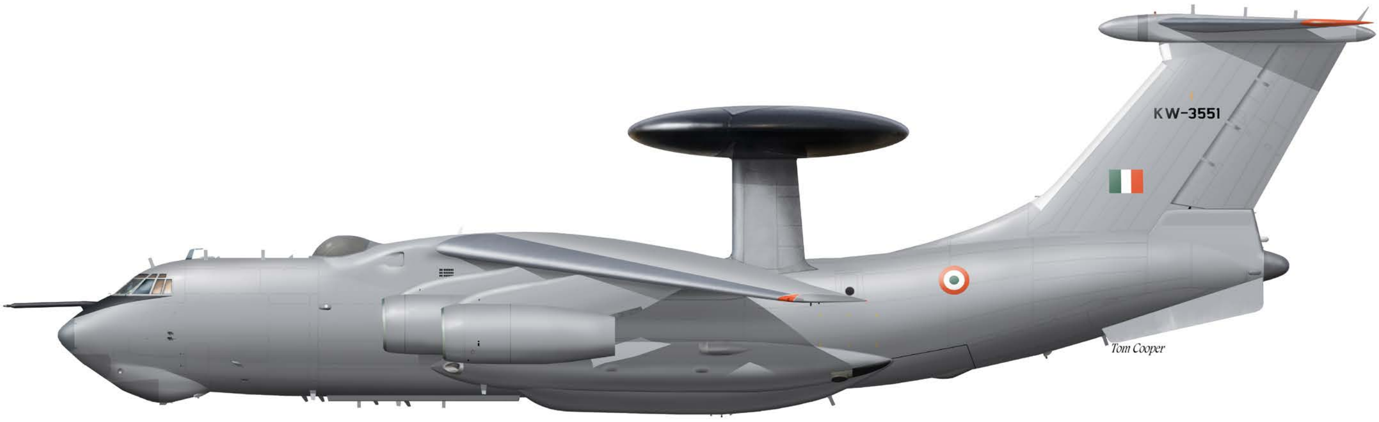
Perhaps the 'most famous' aircraft to take part in counter-terrorist operations during the Mumbai terror attack of 26 November 2008 was this Mi-17MD (serial Z-3362) of the No. 121 Flight 'Sea Eagles', used to deploy commandos of the National Security Guard into the assault on the Nariman House. The Mi-17MD is an assault version, equipped with exhaust diffusers, Kevlar armour plates around the cockpit area and engines, and having a loading ramp in place of the usual clamshell doors. It can carry a load of up to 4,000kg, or a vehicle up to the size of an SUV. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



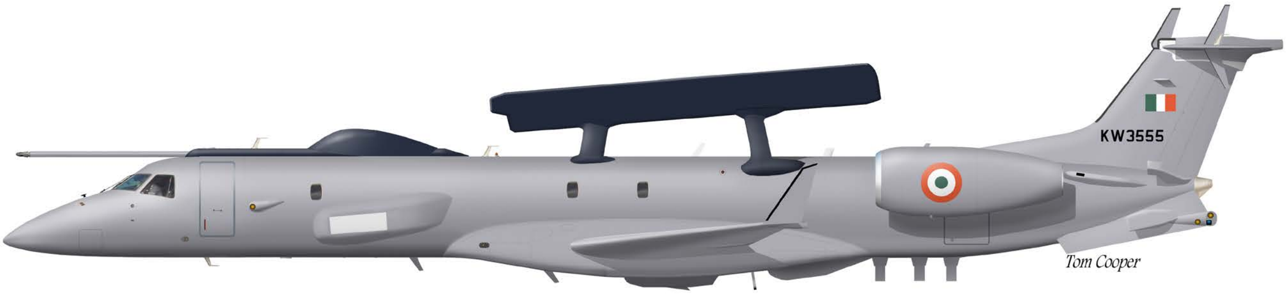
Aiming to replace its ageing Mi-8s, in December 2008 and again in December 2012, India placed an order for a total of 151 Mi-17V-5s – an export version of the Mi-8MTV-5, and widely considered the best-equipped sub-variant of this prolific family. The first of India's Mi-17V-5s entered service in February 2012. On 27 February 2019, this Mi-17V-5 of No. 154 Helicopter Unit, IAF, was shot down in a case of fratricide fire by a SPYDER surface-to-air system of the Indian Air Force over Budgam, in Jammu and Kashmir, killing all six on board (including Squadron Leaders Siddarth Vashisht and Ninad Mandavgane), and one civilian on the ground. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



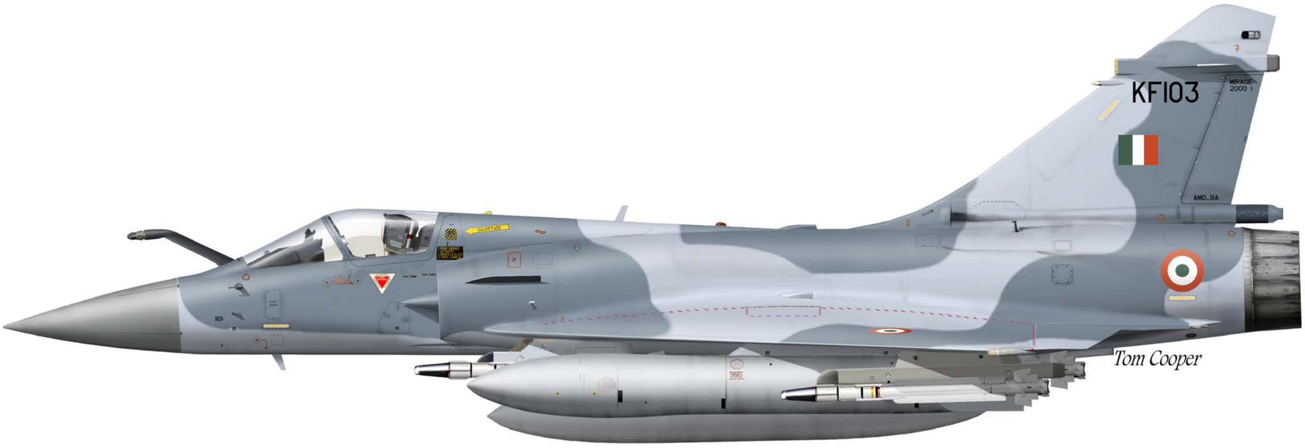
While flown by Wing Commander W. C. Abhinandan Varthaman, this MiG-21Ibis of No. 51 Squadron (Srinagar AB) starred in the 'historic' air combat against F-16s of the PAF, on the morning of 27 February 2019. Varthaman was the leader of a pair of MiG-21s scrambled from Srinagar AB but the only one to fly into the airspace over the Pakistan-administered Kashmir: allegedly, he fired a single R-73 against a high-flying F-16, before being shot down by another. The jet is shown in the standard grey-overall livery of the IAF's fleet of MiG-21s, and in standard armament configuration, including R-73Es (outboard underwing pylon and left lower corner), and R-77 (inboard underwing pylon and lower right corner). (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



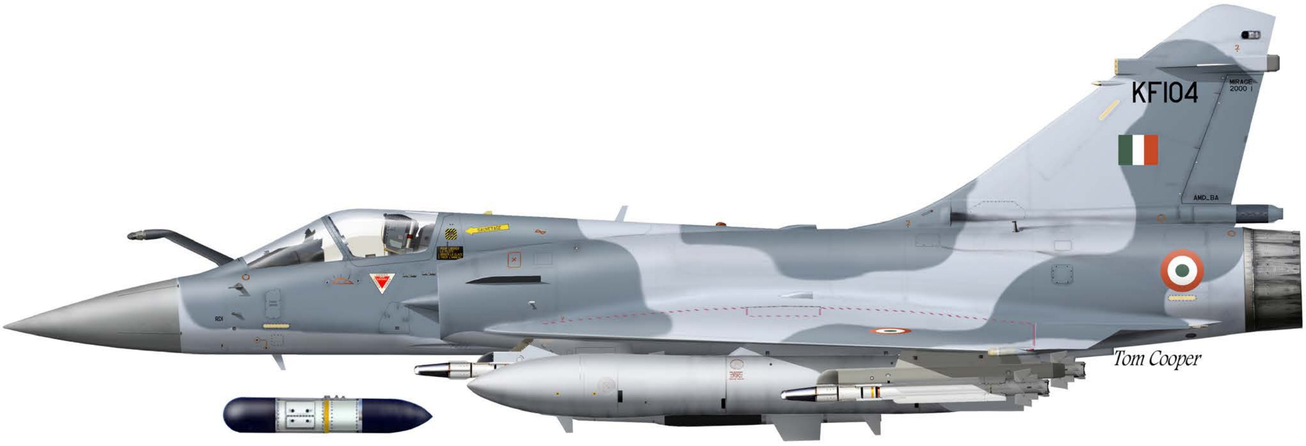
Although merely indicated by published Indian sources, it is de-facto certain that at least one out of three Beriev A-50 AWACS aircraft of No. 50 Squadron was airborne on 27 February 2019 and monitoring the situation in the sky over the southern Kashmir. Known as the Phalcon in IAF service, these aircraft are based on the airframe of the Ilyushin Il-76 and powered by PS-90A-76 engines but equipped with an Israeli-made EL/W-2090 Phalcon radar made by Elta Electronic Industries. The unit is based at the Agra AB, and all of its A-50s are wearing the same, standardised grey-overall livery. Known serials are KW-3551, KW-3552, and KW-3553. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



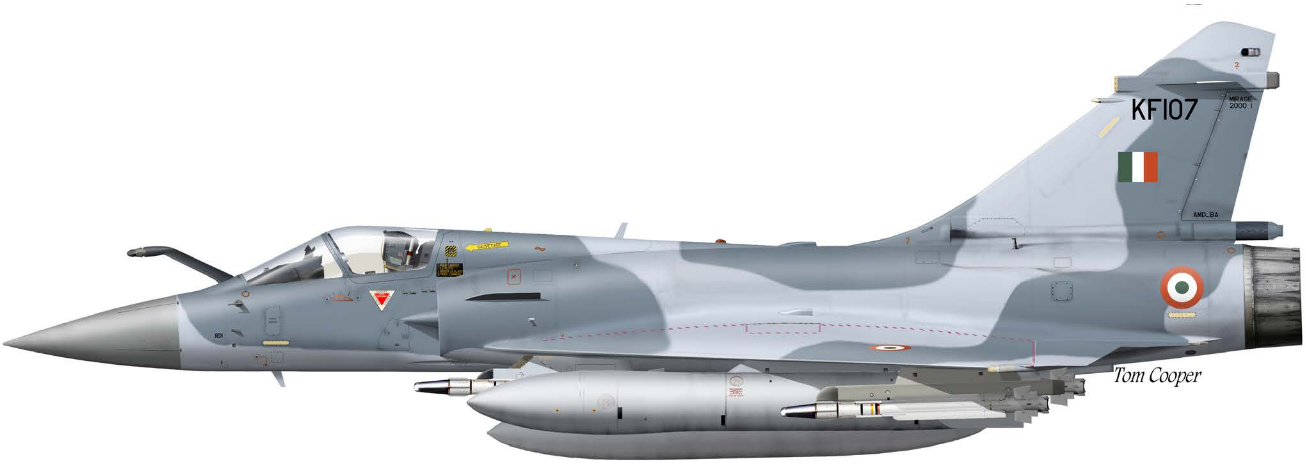
A result of decades of research and development and based on the airframe of the Embraer EMB-145 (from the ERJ-145 family of airliners), equipped with the locally-developed AESA accompanied by electronic-warfare and communication-support systems, was the DRDO Netra AWACS. One of three Netra Mk 1s in service with No. 200 'Netra' Squadron (six additional Mk 2s were on order) was airborne on the morning of 27 February 2019 and its controller, Squadron Leader Minty Agarwal, is known to have been in charge of two MiG-21s scrambled from Srinagar AB. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



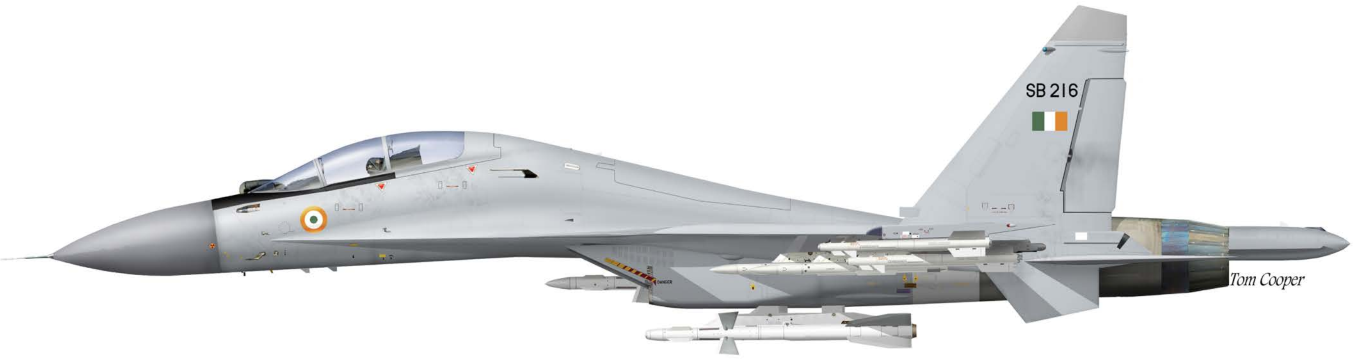
The Indian fleet of Mirage 2000Is (all former Mirage 2000Hs, upgraded to the 2000-5 Mk 2 standard, including the installation of the Thales RDY-2 synthetic aperture radar and compatibility with Damocles targeting pod) played a prominent role in clashes of February 2019. This example from No. 1 'Tigers' Squadron was one of two flying air defence on the morning of 27 February with call-sign 'Ironman': armed with MICA EM air-to-air missiles, they are known to have had a 'stand-off' with Pakistani JF-17s. After facing severe electronic countermeasures, the jet illustrated here – serial KF103 – suffered unspecified technical problems and its pilot was forced to return to base early. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



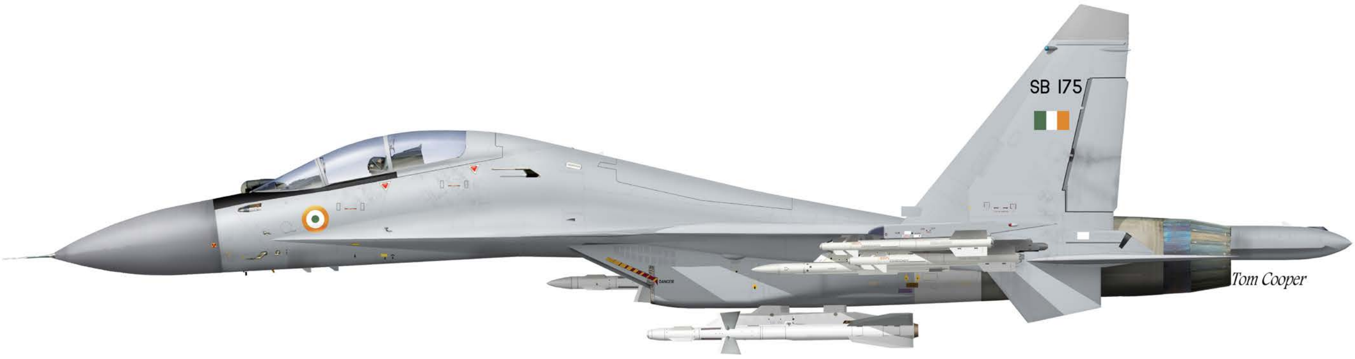
A veteran of 33 years of service with the IAF, the Mirage 2000I serial KF-104, which served with No. 7 'Battleaxe' Squadron from 2019, is known to have taken part in the Balakot air strike, on 26 February 2019. For this mission, it was armed with a single Israeli-developed, Smart, Precise Impact, Cost-Effective (SPICE) EO/GPS-guided bomb: the 907kg-heavy weapon was installed under the centreline, in addition to MICA EM air-to-air missiles. For guidance of the Spice, it also carried a pod with Spice guidance kit, shown as insert below the aircraft. All five Mirage-pilots involved in the Balakot strike were awarded the Vayu Sena Medal, usually awarded to IAF members for a 'job well done' in peacetime. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



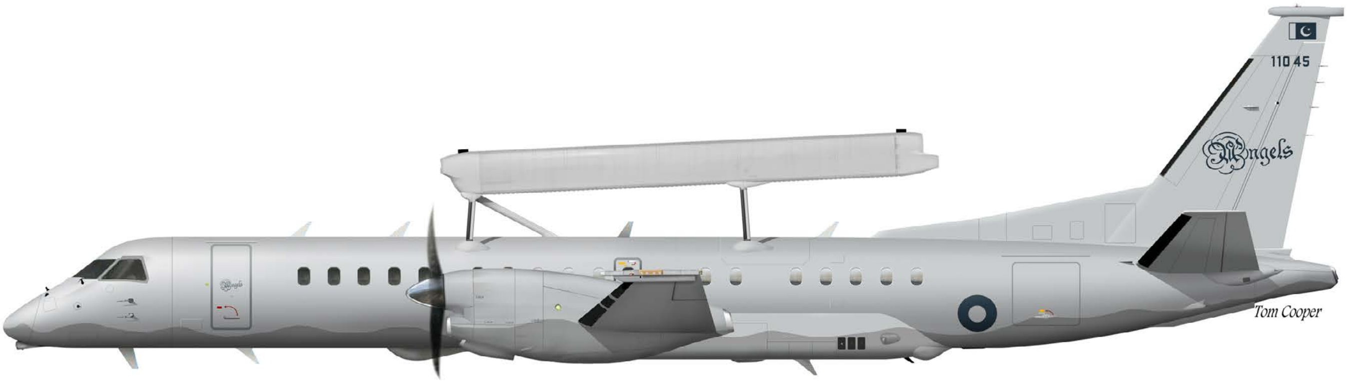
The second jet of the formation with call-sign 'Ironman' on 27 February 2019 was this Mirage 2000I from No. 1 'Tigers' Squadron – the oldest unit of the IAF and its premier multirole and electronic warfare asset. Although facing severe electronic countermeasures and left alone after the wingman was forced to abort due to technical problems, its pilot used his RDY-2 radar and electronic counter-countermeasures to prevent a formation of JF-17s from approaching within the range of their air-to-air missiles. Ever since, the IAF acquired 24 second-hand Mirage 2000s from France: at least 11 of which were used as sources of spares, while the others have bolstered its two squadrons operating the type. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



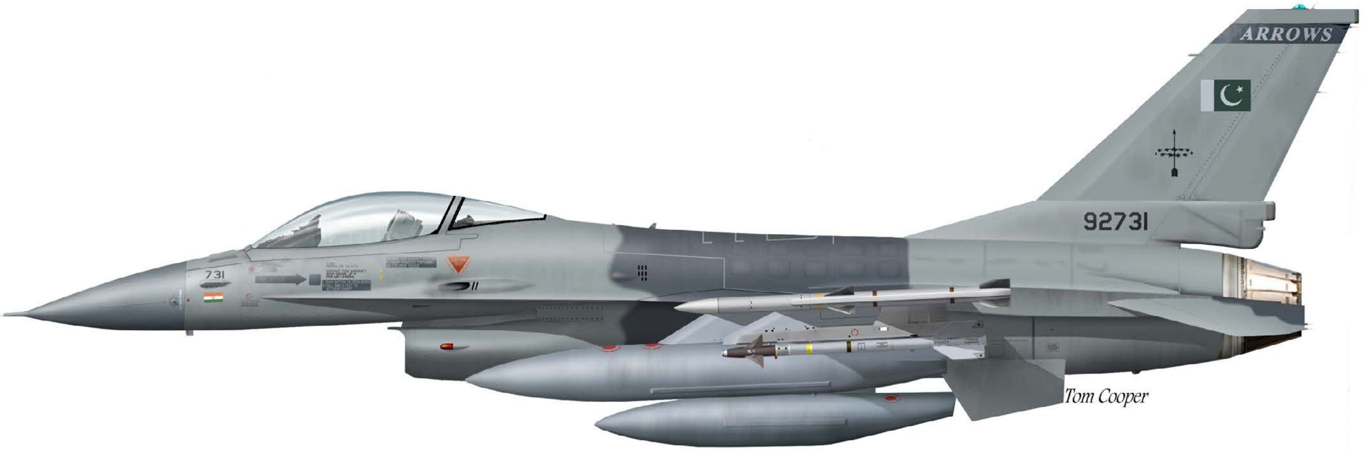
While initial Indian reports indicated the involvement of four Su-30MKIs in air combats of 27 February 2019, this was eventually decreased to two. The identity of only one is definitely known, the SB216 illustrated here. Belonging to No. 15 Squadron (home-based at Sirsa AB), it was flown by the formation leader, call-sign 'Avenger-1'. Notable is its weapons configuration, consisting of no less than 10 missiles, including two R-27Rs (installed between the intakes), two R-27ETs (installed under the intakes), and four each of R-73Es and R-77s. The jet is said to have evaded multiple AIM-120s while trying to acquire one of Pakistanis with its R-27ETs. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



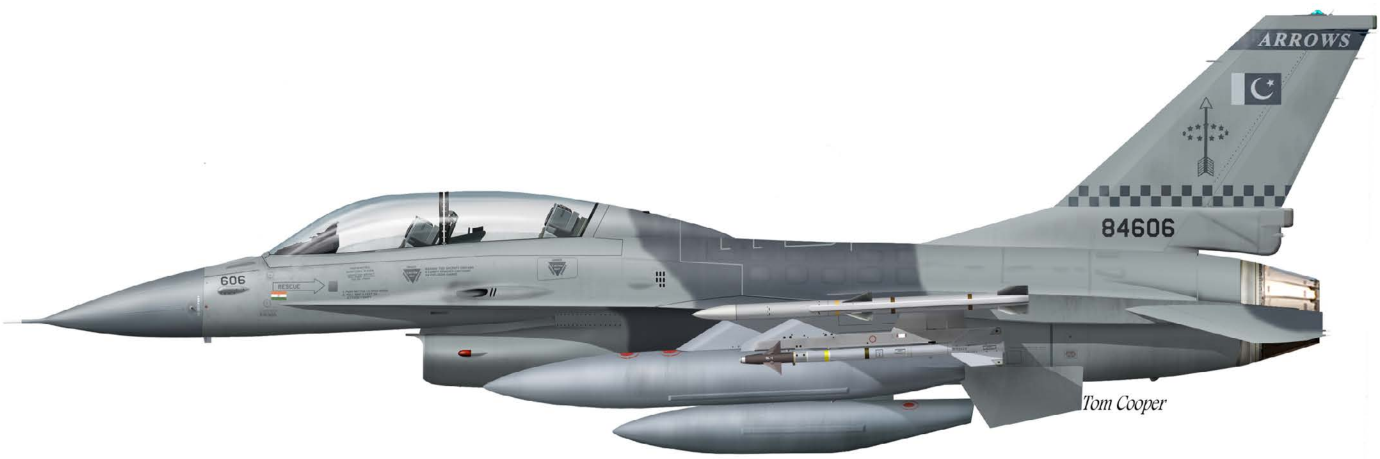
There is some controversy regarding the second Su-30MKI involved in air combats of 27 February 2019, call-sign 'Avenger-2'. During celebrations for the 87th Anniversary of the IAF, serials SB154 and SB155 were shown, allegedly because they flew as 'Avenger-1' and 'Avenger-2'. However, other sources indicate the 'Avenger-2' was actually the jet shown here, SB175: the jet in question should have evaded at least one Pakistani AIM-120 – with help of high-speed manoeuvring and heavy use of the chaff. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



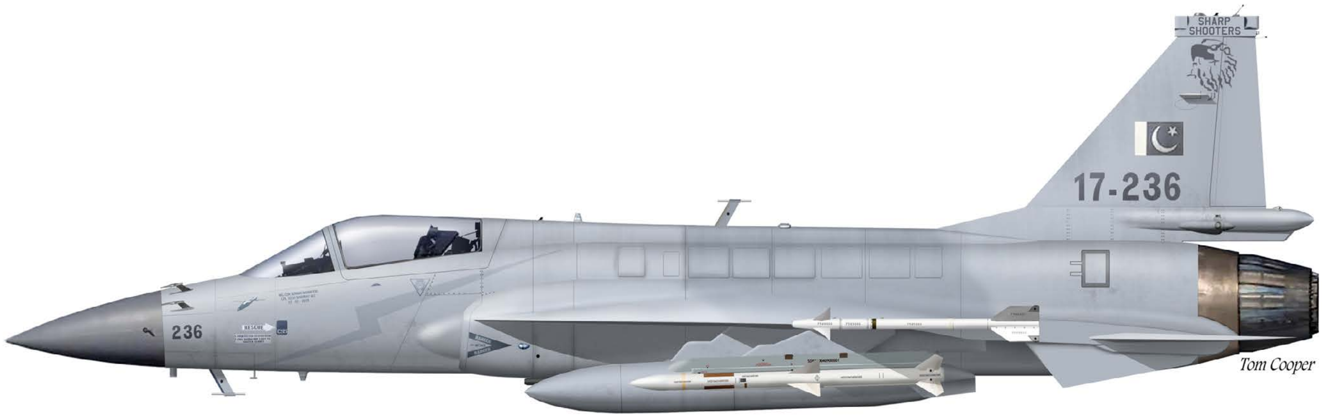
The Saab-2000 Erieye airborne early warning and control system was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The core of the system is a dual-sided antenna for a phased-array, pulse-doppler radar and this is connected to the ground station with help of an associated datalink system. Pakistan originally acquired four aircraft (all based on the Saab 340 airliner, as shown here), of which one was destroyed and two damaged in a Taliban attack on Minhas AB, in August 2012. The damaged aircraft were repaired and the PAF placed an order for three additional examples, most of which were in operations by No. 3 'Angels' Squadron as of February 2019: according to Indian sources, two of these were airborne and controlling PAF operations on the morning of 27 February 2019. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



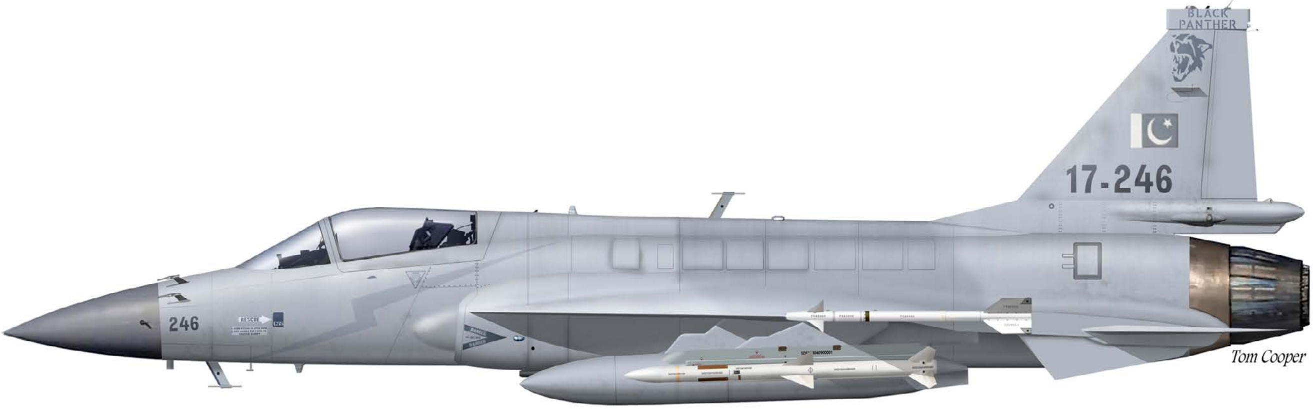
This F-16A-MLU (or F-16AM) serial number 92-731 of No. 11 'Arrows' Squadron, is surrounded by quite some controversy. According to the DG-ISPR, the PAF deployed no F-16s against India on 27 February 2019 at all. Subsequently, the jet appeared as shown here, wearing a 'kill marking' in form of the flag of India, and was reported as flown by Wing Commander Noman Ali Khan to shoot down the IAF MiG-21. Correspondingly, it is shown as armed with AIM-120C-5 air-to-air missile on its wing-tip. However, the DG-ISPR eventually denied this, stressing that Khan flew an JF-17 during that engagement. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



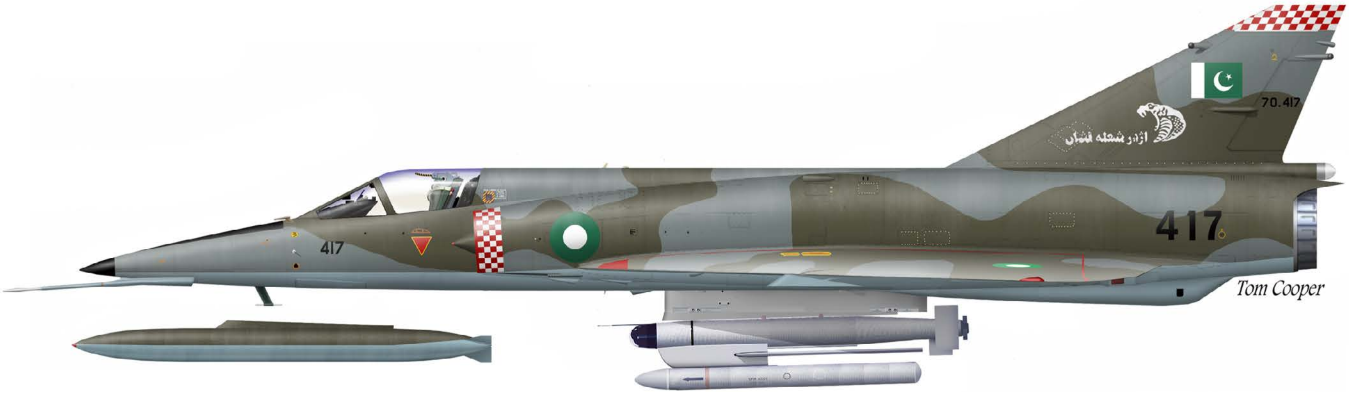
Another Pakistani Fighting Falcon surrounded by controversy since 27 February 2019, is this F-16BM, serial 84-606 from No. 11 'Arrows' Squadron. According to DG-ISPR, no F-16s of the PAF were involved in any of air combats on 27 February 2019. According to unofficial Pakistani sources, this jet was piloted by Hassan Siddiqui to 'shoot down' an Indian Su-30 with an AIM-120C-5 missile. According to DG-ISPR, the Indian jet crashed inside the India-administered Kashmir. Although Pakistan never provided any kind of evidence for this claim, the jet was subsequently decorated with a 'kill marking' in form of the flag of India. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



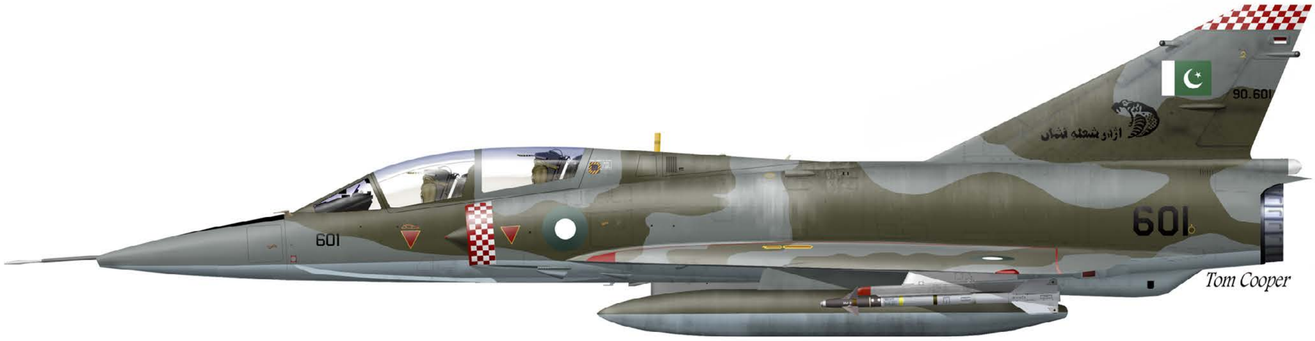
At least as controversial as the involvement of PAF F-16s, is the involvement of multiple JF-17s. According to unofficial Pakistani sources, and according to Indian sources, the jet with serial number 17-236 from No. 17 'Sharp Shooters' Squadron was piloted by Wing Commander Adnam Mahmood. Pakistanis claim it was one of two JF-17s to score kills against the IAF on 27 February 2019 and therefore, it is shown as armed with PL-3s (wing-tip station) and PL-12s (outboard underwing pylon). However, Indians report that it was armed with two Mk.83 bombs and flew a ground strike. Certainly enough, the PAF rushed to decorate Adnam with the Medal of Bravery (Tamgha-e-Basalat) for his actions on that morning. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



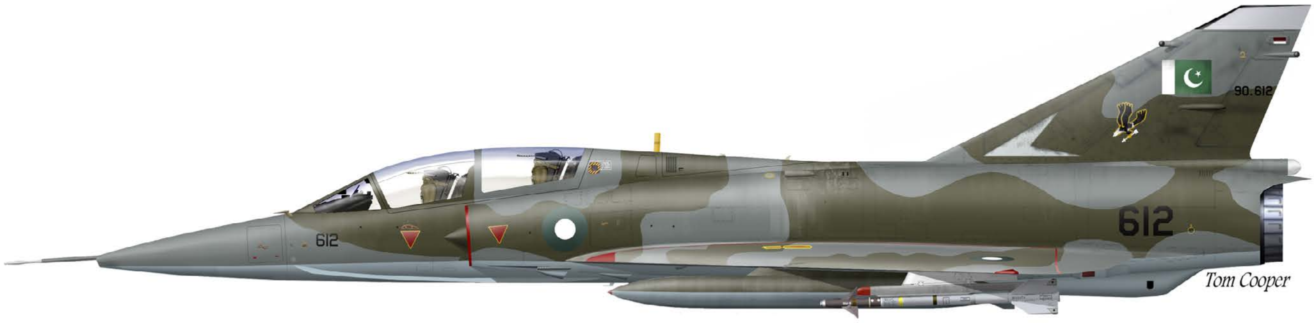
Another PAF JF-17 reportedly involved in the action of 27 February 2019 wore the serial number 17-246. According to Pakistani sources, it should have been one of jets that shot down one of the IAF aircraft: correspondingly, it is shown in air-to-air configuration, armed with PL-3s and PL-12s. According to Indian sources, this jet was piloted by Squadron Leader Sibtain Gardezi and actually armed with two Mk.83s only, which Gardezi (and Adnam) dropped 'randomly'. The PAF decorated Garezi with the Certificate of Merit (Imtiazi Sanad) for his actions on that day. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



According to Indian sources, up to eight Mirage III/5s of the PAF were involved in the air battle of 27 February 2019. This is one of four that has been positively identified so far: the Mirage 5PA (upgraded to ROSE standard) serial 70-417 from No. 15 'Cobra' Squadron. Flown by Squadron Leader Waqar Saleem, it was armed with a single H-4 SOW glide bomb (calibre 1,180kg), originally developed in South Africa in the late 1980s, but meanwhile manufactured under licence in Pakistan. The hefty weapon is usually installed as shown here, under the centreline. Its weight and minimal ground clearance limit other external stores to two 'supersonic' drop tanks of 500-litre capacity, each. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



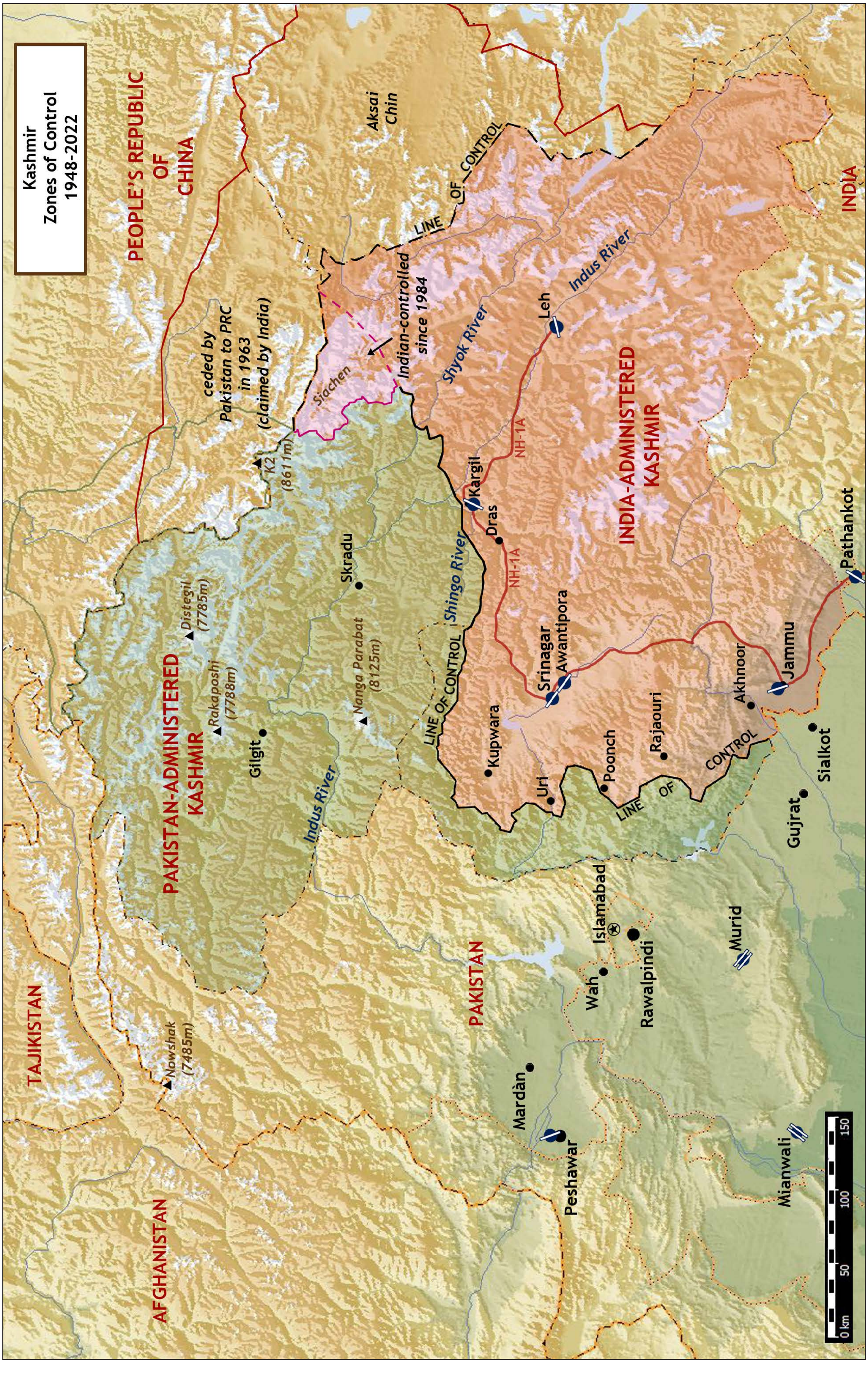
During their first flight-phase, H-4 SOWs are guided by INS and GPS but in the final phase, the electro-optical guidance system is activated, and the weapon depends on manual guidance for precision. This task is usually completed by the backseater of the second Mirage: in the case of the weapon released by Saleem, this was the Mirage IIIDP 90-601 (upgraded to ROSE standard) from No. 15 Squadron, piloted by Flight Officer A. Rauf and Wing Commander F. Ahmed. Except for guiding Saleem's H-4 SOW, their jet should have been armed with AIM-9L/M Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, but it is unclear whether it carried 800-litre drop tanks, as illustrated here. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Another of the two-seat Mirage IIIDPs that guided H-4 SOWs on 27 February 2019 is known to have been this example, serial 90-612. While this reconstruction is based on photographs showing it with markings of No. 5 Squadron, on that morning it was crewed by Wing Commander R. Sulehri and Squadron Leader F. Hassan from Rafiqui-based No. 15 Squadron. According to DG-ISPR, all of the H-4s released by PAF Mirages on 27 February 2019 were intentionally flown away from their targets: however, photographs of their wreckage indicated they were jettisoned – probably because of the presence of IAF's interceptors. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

A Su-30 of Squadron No. 30 'Rhinos', IAF, seen taxiing to the EOR on the first mission of exercise 'Indra Dhanush 07'. (Mike Freer)

An upgraded Mirage IIIRP reconnaissance fighter of the Pakistan Air Force, as seen on the runway of the Shahbaz AB, near Jacobabad. Visible in the rear is an F-16: both types are operated by the re-organised No. 5 Squadron. (US Air Force Photo, by Lieutenant Colonel Michael Shavers).


Kashmir
Zones of Control
1948-2022
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
Aksai Chin
LINE OF CONTROL
ceded by Pakistan to PRC in 1963 (claimed by India)
Siachen
Indian-controlled since 1984
K2 (8611m)
Shyok River
Indus River
Leh
INDIA-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR
INDIA
NH-1A
Kargil
Dras
Shingo River
Skradu
Distegil (7785m)
Rakaposhi (7788m)
Nanga Parabat (8125m)
Gilgit
PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR
Srinagar
Awantipora
Kupwara
Uri
Poonch
Rajaouri
Akhnoor
Jammu
Pathankot
Sialkot
Gujrat
Islamabad
Rawalpindi
Wah
Murid
PAKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
Nowshak (7485m)
Mardàn
Peshawar
AFGHANISTAN
Mianwali
0 km
50
100
150

Map shows zones of control of Kashmir – the principal reason for continuous war of terror waged by Pakistan against India. (Map by Tom Cooper)

> purposes but perhaps only to give protection to the investigating or raiding officers. On 26 November 2008 the officers and men of SOS were deployed at Cama Hospital, Taj Mahal and Oberoi Hotels. Some of them were also deployed at the Bomb explosion site at Vile Parle and Byculla. They were also present when Crime Branch teams carried out intensive search of four hotels in Colaba area after receiving real term intelligence from Intelligence Bureau during the attacks.[48]

Still, despite the absence of a dedicated commando unit, Mumbai does have (what could have been) a useful armed response group in the form of its Local Armed Police (LA) units totalling nearly 4,000 men located at the following places:[49]

LA-I/RCP: Naigaon, Mumbai-14
LA-II: Tardeo/ orli, Mumbai-18
LA-III: Worli Police Camp, Mumbai-25
LA-IV: Marol Police Camp, Mumbai-59

At LA-I, the Riot Control Police – three companies of them – form the city's elite riot control unit. In addition, one platoon in each company is supposed to be equipped for counter-insurgency duties. At least one RCP company should have been on alert that fateful night – along with its COIN trained platoon. It was this solitary platoon that formed Mumbai's potential QRT on the night of the 26 November 2008. However, neither the RCP nor the LA Police were of much use during those vital initial encounters. Indeed, they were slow to react and deploy and there is little doubt that the greater burden of the first response to the terrorist attack, fell on the ordinary civil police who bore the brunt of the terrorists' fury. Ultimately, despite their shortcomings, they secured the ultimate prize – the live capture of the terrorist Ajmal Amir Iman aka Kasab.

Post 26 November, much attention has focused on the ubiquitous and infamous firearm that is the standard armament of the Indian constable: the .303 calibre Lee Enfield Rifle, in either its SMLE Rifle No.1 Mk. I I configuration or its Rifle No.4 configuration. Over 500,000 of these rifles and 90,000 of their cousin, the .410 musket, formed the nucleus of India's police arsenal in 2008. It should of course be noted that at any given time, the Indian constable, wherever located, is unarmed. Press reports seem to indicate that at the CST, of 60 police and security personnel present, only 6 were armed and of the 20 police personnel at the roadblock that captured Ajmal Amir Iman aka Kasab – at the cost of the life of the valiant Tukaram Gopal Ombale – only four were armed with any type of firearm.[50]

It is noted that at CST, of the six armed policemen, at least five had the rifle and one a 9mm carbine. Of these, at least three policemen did engage the terrorists and none of them were able to neutralise a single terrorist. It was reported that the 9mm carbine magazine was charged with only 10 rounds instead of 30 and even then, it jammed after only three rounds. Other policemen found that their rifle bolts refused to work after firing only two to three rounds. All of this can be attributed to deplorable maintenance of the weapons.[51]

Yet the inadequacies of the Enfield rifle should not be an excuse for the 26 November fiasco. Moreover, there is no excuse for such a large percentage of the force being unarmed. Indeed, it has been reported that Mumbai took several steps to equip each station with on average, 25 SLRs, five carbines and 10 pistols in addition to about 25 rifles of .303 calibre and 11 revolvers of .38 calibre. Senior police officers boasted of the fact that there were now adequate stocks of 9mm and .45 calibre pistols along with carbines, SLRs and teargas guns. Was this merely public relations rhetoric? Where were the weapons on that fateful night?[52] The answers might be found in gleaning from the Pradhan Committee report which noted:

> 53. Availability of arms and ammunition for Maharashtra Police is a serious problem. It was already mentioned that QRT could not do any firing since September 2007 due to shortage of ammunition although they are to do firing practice every 4th day according to DGP Sri A.N. Roy. The Committee found several reasons for this situation. The basic weapons for District Police (Including city police) for law & order duties used to be .410 musket while for SRPF it was .303 rifle. Now Indian ordnance factories have stopped making them. The Draft Weapon Policy of changing this into 7.62 SLR for law & order situations, 5.56 Insas Rifles, AK-47 rifles, 9mm carbines and 7.62 SLRs for Naxal areas, terrorist operations etc was drafted and submitted to the government who approved this in principle on 30–06-2008. Due to delay in approving the Draft Weapon Policy the cost which was Rs.168 crores in 2007 has gone up to Rs.210 crores. Meanwhile, the yearly requirement shot up with the induction of 33,000 posts in 2005 out of 55,000 created to partly fulfil the shortage of manpower according to 1960 yardstick. Prices also have shot up. Due to shortage of funds only Rs.15 crores were sanctioned during the last 5 years against a demand of Rs.66.14 crores. This has created serious shortage of arms and ammunition for Maharashtra Police. However, government in the Home Department has informed the Committee on 6–04–09 that the draft weapons policy which was submitted by DGP on 20-12-2007 was not approved due to the difference between the said proposal and subsequent proposal submitted on 07–06-2008. However, Govt. approved it 'In principle' on 30–06-2008. The Committee however feels that this issue needs to be sorted out urgently rather than prolonging the correspondence.
>
> 54. The Committee was informed by the DGP that Maharashtra police needs Rs.65 crores worth of ammunition in case each policeman has to fire a mandatory 40 rounds each year. But for the last five years they are getting each year only Rs.3 crores. The available ammunition is required to be allotted on priority to the Naxal affected areas, special commandos et cetera Hence no ammunition for firing practice was available.
>
> 55. The DGP has said that lack of firing practice due to shortage of ammunition has created serious disability in the offensive capability of the police. For example, the last supply of AK-47 rounds was 45,000 received in 2005. After 2006 December, no ammunition has been received. However, the Home Department statement received on 6 April 2009, has shown that a quantity of 1,00,000 AK-47 rounds was received on 2.12.2005 as against indent of 2 lakhs for 2005–06. Further it has said that a quantity of 1,65,810 was received on 24.11.2006 and 04.07.2007 against a demand of 2 lakhs for 2006–07. For 2008–09 a demand of 16,16,160 was made but only 38,195 were approved which was not received as on April 6, 2009. The Committee is unable to reconcile the differences in the reports between DGP and HD and would urge quick resolution of this problem so that supply would reach the police units concerned.
>
> 56. The Commissioner of Police has brought to the Committee's attention that the Mumbai Police has an acute shortage of automatic weapons and ammunitions besides inadequate bullet proof jackets. Likewise, they lack modern communication equipment/systems while facing a serious situation such as 26 November when all the communication

> channels had got clogged. The Committee was informed that during the Legislature's Nagpur Session, held in December 2008, the government had announced a number of measures/schemes to augment capabilities of Maharashtra Police to face terrorist threats/attacks.[53]

Even these shortcomings, as serious as they are, might not have been fatal. Unfortunately, the response time of the police was so poor, that the terrorists had free run of large parts of the conflict zone for an inordinately long time. Furthermore, it would appear, again from press reports, that fishermen who witnessed the landing of at least some of the attackers, called the police who apparently, arrived late. Part of the problem remains a shortage of vehicles – 1,500 vehicles for a force of 42,000 is clearly inadequate. This is compounded by the fact that serviceability rates are usually lower and many of these vehicles are large trucks, ill-suited to rapid response in crowded urban environs.[54]

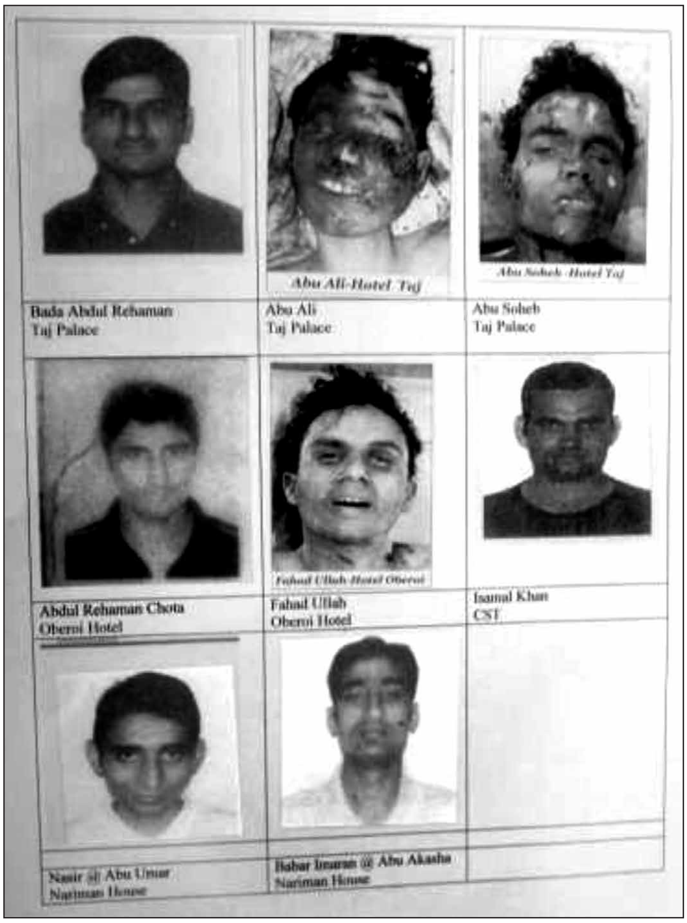
The problem is further exacerbated by very poor communications and coordination that rendered the single platoon that comprised the Mumbai QRT, useless. It also prevented assistance from the heavily armed State Reserve Police battalions from being summoned to the conflict zone at short notice. The fact that the LA Police units were not fully committed within a short space of time to seal off areas of the conflict zone and to contain the threat, speaks volumes for the poor coordination that characterised the police response to the assault. In short, poor coordination and delayed response ensured that police units were committed piecemeal, support units were not deployed with any degree of urgency and the Mumbai QRT and Maharastra SRP were rendered impotent.[55]

Yet, it should also be noted that the Mumbai police responded to incidents with tenacity and showing great courage. Outgunned and with poor intelligence, they responded within their means. To quote the Pradhan Committee:

> The Committee has not found any serious lapses in the conduct of any individual officer. What we have found are instances of lack of: intelligent appreciation of threats, handling of intelligence, maintaining high degree of efficiency in instruments specifically set-up to deal with terrorist attacks and certainly lack of overt and visible leadership in carrying out operations to face multi-targeted attacks. In fact, the last factor has led to public anger and resentment, both against the political, as well as the administrative establishments.
>
> The Committee was greatly impressed with the speed and urgency with which the Mumbai police machinery, as a whole, reacted to unfolding of events at five different venues in short space of time. Also, we note with appreciation, initiative exhibited by younger police officers who led their men in facing the terrorists who showed exemplary courage and enterprise.[56]

Learning lessons from Mumbai, most major Indian cities established urban commando units specifically tasked with dealing with similar attacks. Each State, anxious to avoid an embarrassment like Mumbai, trained and equipped small teams from their armed police battalions and undertook joint exercises with the NSG and military in hotels, shopping malls and industrial sites. This last effort, in conjunction with improved coastal security, was the core of India's response to the attacks of 26 November 2008. It was not until after the governing UPA lost the 2014 elections that, along with continuing to build internal response capabilities, India began to develop a more robust response to terror attacks.

Tukaram Gopal Omble was an assistant Sub-Inspector of Mumbai police and was killed in action while fighting with terrorists during Mumbai attacks. The Government of Maharastra has erected a memorial of him at the place he was shot by the the terrorists. (Chinmayee Mishra)



Photos of eight of the Mumbai attackers. (PIB)

The Political Tempest of 2014

While the Mumbai attacks did not have a direct impact on the 2009 Indian elections, with the UPA government of Dr. Manmohan Singh securing victory with a larger share of the votes and seats in Parliament, continuing terror attacks proved to be a major bugbear for the government and cost it dearly in credibility. Indeed, following the Mumbai attacks, there was a spate of terror attacks including bomb blasts, Maoist terror attacks and terror attacks in the Northeast, all of which gave the impression of abject impotency on the part of the UPA government. Between November 2008 and May 2014 these attacks included:[57]

Anger at the UPA's impotence was combined with a spate of devastating corruption scandals. The economy was slowing down and there was an abject failure of state supported welfare schemes. This created fertile ground for a groundswell of support for the main opposition party – the BJP – and its new leader, the charismatic and competent, if controversial, Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi

The General Elections of 2014, held between 7 April 2014 and 12 May 2014, with results being declared on 16 May 2014, marked an important watershed in India's political history. For the first time since 1984, a single political party won a majority. The BJP secured, on its own, 282 seats in Parliament, more than the 273 required for a majority. It did so without the wave of sympathy that assisted the Congress party in 1984 (following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi) and faced a theoretically potent force in the form of the UPA and its allied parties.

Modi's government was immediately branded as a right-wing, Hindu-nationalist entity by the international media and his detractors within India. Whilst there are certainly elements of this in the BJP, there has been a repeated tendency to exaggerate this aspect. The core of Modi's appeal is the fact that his government proved to be largely scandal-free, effective at delivery of basic welfare measures and, more importantly, a perception of working sincerely for the least advantaged sections of Indian society. In 2014, the desire for change made his appeal difficult to resist and the UPA met with defeat.

Rather surprisingly, for a party that made a fetish of hostility to Pakistan, Modi's government was initially very keen on improving relations with Pakistan. He invited Prime Minister Sharrif to his inauguration. He sought to emphasise improved bilateral trade relations between the countries of South Asia, including Pakistan. However, despite efforts at a rapprochement, Pakistan's meeting with separatist Kashmiri leaders in August 2014, soured the mood. Despite this, Modi persevered despite coming under severe criticism for his relatively soft approach to Islamabad as terrorist attacks continued, albeit at a lower rate than under the UPA – an underappreciated achievement of Modi.

It is of particular interest to note that since Modi's election 2014, there has not been a major mass casualty terrorist attack in any major urban centre in India, though there have been incidents of IED blasts and targeted killings. Attacks on security forces went on, but there is little doubt, whether thanks to improved intelligence, more preventative measures, or perhaps simply an improvement in coordination between Modi's government and the various state police forces, that attacks in major urban centres were dramatically reduced. The civilian death toll, which was over 1000 between 2004 and 2014, was substantially reduced.

Terrorist attacks November 2008 – May 2014

Date	Incident	Locale
January 1, 2009	2009 Guwahati bombings	Assam
April 6, 2009	2009 Assam bombings	Assam
February 13, 2010	2010 Pune bombing	Pune
February 15, 2010	Silda camp attack	West Bengal
April 6, 2010	April 2010 Maoist attack in Dantewada	Chhattisgarh
17 May 2010	2010 Dantewada bus bombing	Chhattisgarh
28 May 2010	Jnaneswari Express train derailment	West Bengal
December 7, 2010	2010 Varanasi bombing	Varanasi
July 13, 2011	2011 Mumbai bombings	Mumbai
September 7, 2011	2011 Delhi bombing	Delhi
February 13, 2012	2012 attacks on Israeli diplomats	Delhi
August 1, 2012	2012 Pune bombings	Pune
February 21, 2013	2013 Hyderabad blasts	Hyderabad
March 13, 2013	March 2013 Srinagar attack	Jammu and Kashmir
17 April 2013	2013 Bangalore blast	Bengaluru
25 May 2013	2013 Naxal attack in Darbha valley	Chhattisgarh
24 June 2013	June 2013 Srinagar attack	Jammu and Kashmir
7 July 2013	July 2013 Maoist attack in Dumka	Chhattisgarh
7 July 2013	Bodh Gaya bombings	Bihar
27 October 2013	2013 Patna bombings	Bihar
26 December 2013	2013 Jalpaiguri bombing	West Bengal
11 March 2014	2014 Chhattisgarh attack	Chhattisgarh
25 April 2014	Blast in Jharkhand	Jharkhand
28 April 2014	Blast in Budgam District	Jammu and Kashmir
1 May 2014	2014 Chennai train bombing	Tamil Nadu
1 May 2014	May 2014 Assam violence	Assam
12 May 2014	Maoist blast in Gadchiroli District	Jharkhand

However, the issue of terrorism and the need to respond to it, raised its head when the IAF base at Pathankot in Punjab was attacked by terrorists on 2 January 2016. This attack, by the United Jihad Council of Kashmir, a front for the JEM, killed seven security personnel and a civilian while all six terrorists were killed. No aircraft were damaged and it was reported at the time, that the security forces had tried to capture the terrorists, leading to unnecessary casualties among their ranks. India briefly entertained the idea of a joint investigation of the event with Pakistan but quickly doubted the intentions of the Pakistanis and dropped the idea.[58]

Relations between Modi's government and the Pakistanis began to cool dramatically as it became clear that terrorism would continue. India, in the meantime, groped for options. Things came to a head in September 2016, when an attack on an army base at Uri changed everything. India had decided that it had suffered enough and chose to change the method of its response. The Uri attack and the subsequent 'surgical strikes' would set a new Indian response pattern.

4

URI AND THE SURGICAL STRIKE

On 18 September 2016, four terrorists belonging to JEM attacked an Indian Army Brigade HQ's administrative base camp with grenades. Taking place at a time when there was to be a rotation of troops – where soldiers from 6 Bihar were replacing soldiers from 10 Dogra – there was a large number of non-fire retardant accommodation tents in use to house the soldiers. These tents caught fire and 17 soldiers were burnt to death in the rapidly spreading conflagration. The main target, however, a fuel depot was not damaged and whilst an additional 19 to 30 soldiers sustained injuries, two more later succumbing to their wounds, Indian troops hunted down the four terrorists and killed them after a six hour gun battle.[1]

India's then Defence Minister, the highly competent late Manohar Parrikar, was livid at the attack and in an uncharacteristically blunt response, hinted at lapses in Indian security, as well as indicating that a response would be forthcoming:

> Something must have been wrong … Though I will not go into details of it because it is a very sensitive matter. When something goes wrong while you try to correct it you should also ensure that it does not happen again … I will not go into the details of what we are going to do. But if required I can have a knee-jerk reaction also. Sometimes a knee-jerk reaction is also required … This country is a very responsible power, that does not mean I will sleep over this kind of terrorism that is being pushed across the border. How I do it, is entirely for the government and Prime Minister to decide.[2]

A probe into the attack was launched shortly after the incident and its findings confirmed Parrikar's suspicions and identified serious lapses. The Indian National Intelligence Agency initial report, as cited in the Indian press, noted:

> The growth of wild grass and bushes around the perimeter of the brigade is seen as one of the factors that could have facilitated undetected movement of the terrorists close to the fencing, which was cut by the ultras to sneak inside the base … Standard security procedures provide for mowing any tall grass and cutting of bushes around vital security installations but it was not done around the target site. The initial probe has also pointed towards the failure of two manned guard posts, located barely 150ft from each other, to detect the intrusion inside the base by the terrorists, they said, adding it could have been due to lack of coordination between the two guard posts.[3]

As might be expected, India was incensed at the terrorist attack and even as responsibility was affixed and security lapses addressed, a far more rigorous response was prepared against the JEM. Indeed, shortly after the attack, captured equipment seemed to link the terrorists to Pakistani bases and weapons were found with Pakistani markings. In addition, it became clear that the infiltration had taken place through the Haji Peer pass about 24 hrs prior to the attack with the terrorists staying at the village of Sukhdar which had a commanding view of the Uri base.

Whilst Pakistan sought to use its usual approach of plausible deniability, this time, India was not prepared to tolerate obfuscation. The Indian External Affairs Ministry began by laying the groundwork, stating:

> In the recent incidents, we have recovered a number of items that include GPS from the bodies of terrorists with coordinates that indicate the point and time of infiltration across the LoC and the subsequent route to the terror attack site; grenades with Pakistani markings; communication matrix sheets; communication equipment; and other stores made in Pakistan, including food, medicines and clothes.[4]

Further diplomatic moves were made when India cancelled its participation in the 19th SAARC summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan joining the de facto boycott. Bilateral cooperation between India and Pakistan, which had rather surprisingly, been a priority for Prime Minister Modi, was now put on to the back burner with Indian moving increasingly to cut its relationship with Pakistan, to a bare minimum. The first steps were taken in 2016 following the Uri attack but came into full force in 2019, after the Pulwama attack. In fact, the Uri attack was perhaps the last step that shattered any illusions in the Modi government that a degree of normalcy could be achieved with Pakistan. The consequences are still being felt.

That India would need to respond militarily in some fashion, was increasingly evident. National anger, political compulsions and a sense that Pakistani based terrorist organisations were operating with impunity, dictated that some sort of strike against them was in order.

The Myanmar Precedent

On 4 June 2015, an umbrella organisation called the United National Liberation Front of West South East Asia (UNLFW), which was comprised of a number of insurgent groups – the National Socialist Council of Nagaland [Khaplang] (NSCN[K]), United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PRPK), People's Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit) (NDFB[S]) – staged an ambush on the administrative convoy of the 6th Battalion of the Dogra Regiment near Chandel in Manipur. This attack, which was the most vicious in years, killed 18 soldiers and injured 15 others.[5] The need for a response was acutely felt by the Indian Army as well as being a demand of the broader population which sought reassurance that the armed forces were able to contain insurgencies.

The abrogation of ceasefire agreements in the region, according to a keen observer of the insurgencies of India's Northeast and a former combat officer in theatre, Brigadier Rumel Dahyia, was the cause of the ambush. He noted:

> The recent spurt in extremist activities is attributed to the abrogation of the ceasefire agreement by NSCN (K) in March 2015 and the formation of the UNFLW. Insurgent groups forming part of the UNFLW have their pockets of support in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The formation of the umbrella

Visible on this still from a video are explosions of the terrorist attacks. Probably the smoke columns come from burning military vehicles of Indian Army. (NDTV)

Indian troops patrol Uri after JEM's terrorist attack against the Indian army. (NDTV)

organisation has, perhaps, led to a pooling of cadres, weapons, intelligence and logistics. The obvious conclusion is that the security forces have been behind the curve in not anticipating daring attacks by the extremists and lacked adequate intelligence. Since the attacks on security forces had come down significantly in the past couple of years, it is likely that troops had become complacent and did not follow Standard Operations Procedures (SOP) such as sanitising the route before the movement of a convoy, maintaining distances between vehicles and ensuring that QRT are ready, et cetera This must have also contributed to the losses suffered by the Army and Assam Rifles. Appropriate lessons are always drawn from such incidents by the Army and, at least for some time to come, such incidents are unlikely to take place.[6]

India's response was not long in coming but was, in many ways, somewhat bolder and more unexpected than most observers had been anticipating. The Indian public expected a more intense pace to counter-insurgency operations across the Northeast, with attendant mobilisation of locally available forces based along the India-Myanmar border. These included units such as 12 Bihar and the Assam Rifles both of which have borne the brunt of counter-insurgency operations throughout all of India's Northeastern States.

Rather surprisingly, on 9 June 2015, using the best available intelligence reports, the Indian Air Force and 21 PARA (SF) launched a cross-border operation along the India-Myanmar border. These attacks destroyed two terrorist camps, one each of NSCN (K) and KYKL, along the said India-Myanmar border and were conducted in Myanmese territory along the Nagaland and Manipur border at two locations. In addition, the army attacked two transit camps of Naga terrorist groups. This operation was conducted, apparently, with the knowledge of the Myanmar government which has its own difficulties with insurgent groups operating in these remote border regions.[7]

The operation itself was relatively small, a force of 72 commandos from 21 PARA (SF), wearing the uniform markings of 12 Bihar (a unit based on the India-Myanmar border for normal duties) and supported by a force of Dhruv and Mi-17 helicopters, struck the insurgent camps at night, making good use of night-vision equipment. Using a mix of rocket launchers and small arms, they were able to strike the camps and exfiltrate successfully without sustaining any casualties. Rappelling from Dhruv helicopters, the commandos trekked some 50km into Myanmar and achieved total surprise. During the 40 minute operation, 38 terrorists were killed and the camps destroyed.[8]

Whilst India had conducted cross-border operations into Myanmar before – *Operation Golden Bird* in April-May 1995 – these were done with no coordination with the Myanmar government and as such, achieved limited success. However, the 2015 raid, though more limited in scope, achieved results out of all proportion to the

The burnt out wreck of an Indian army truck following the ambush in Manipur. (PTI)

risks taken or the casualties inflicted as India demonstrated that Myanmar would no longer be a safe haven for insurgent groups. As Brigadier Dahyia noted:

> The recent cross-border operation is being rightly described as a success because we could now combine political decision making and intelligence acquisition with operational capabilities of the Armed forces. This need not be the only surgical operation to be carried out against terrorist camps, but this is again also not likely to be the norm followed repeatedly. A scholar from Northeast who undertook a motorcycle journey from Imphal to Mandalay in 2013 mentioned that there were many agents located across Moreh who offered, for a fee, to take him to the camps of any of the Manipur insurgent groups located not far from the border. If this is true, then a higher degree of coordination with the government of Myanmar would be necessary. Having signed a peace agreement with the NSCN (K), the government of Myanmar may not be as forthcoming to act against terrorists based in North Sagaing region particularly at a time when it is deeply involved in fighting the Kokangs, Kachins and other rebel groups within its territory. There are reports of permissiveness on the part of Myanmar Army units and sub-units in allowing the presence of camps of some Indian insurgent groups in Chin state and Sagaing Division.[9]

The other significant point to note about the success of this operation against insurgents in the Northeast was the confidence given to India's Special Forces to conduct covert operations into hostile territories, locating terrorist camps and neutralising them. As such, when a response to the Uri terrorist attacks was being considered, India's Special Forces were the first choice to spearhead such a response.

Special Forces

Whether in Siachen or Kargil, India has used its Special Forces to lead combat efforts in difficult conditions. They proved to be innovative, capable of enormous feats of endurance and able to adapt to changing conditions in difficult environments, with relative ease. All three services possess good Special Forces Units which were called into action as India formulated a plan of action to respond to the Uri terror attacks. A combination of surprise, stealth and effectiveness would be necessary to achieve the desired results. However, unlike the Myanmar raid of 2015, there would be no cooperation across the LoC and supporting the operation would be more difficult if the commandos needed to be extracted in a hurry.

Most of the Indian Army's Special Forces are grouped into the Parachute regiment. This parent regiment is one which has its roots in The Second World War and has had many operations to its credit including a battalion level para drop during the 1971 war and has subsequently, operated extensively in military operations.[10]

The Parachute Regiment

The Parachute Regiment presently has eight Special Forces, five Airborne, two Territorial Army and one Counter-Insurgency (RR) battalions on its lists. Additional battalions might be raised in time but currently, the Regiment has chosen to maintain this strength.

Plans emerged in the mid-1980s, to take the three para commando battalions from the Parachute Regiment and bring them together under an individual specialised organisation, the Special Forces Regiment. However, these plans were abandoned, and they continue to be trained and recruited by the Parachute Regiment and thus, must perforce, remain part of the Parachute Regiment's order of battle.

The total strength of the regiment stands at about some 4,500 personnel in the Paratroopers (Airborne), whilst the Para (SF) includes about 1,500 operatives. The 50th Parachute Brigade comprises the following units: [11]

- 2 airborne infantry battalions
- 1 Special Forces battalion
- 1 Parachute Field Regiment (Artillery) (9 & 17 Parachute Field Regiments in rotation)
- 60 Parachute Field Hospital
- 411 (Independent) Parachute Field Company (Bombay Sappers)
- 622 Parachute Composite Company (ASC)
- 50th (Independent) Parachute Brigade OFP (Ordnance)
- 50th (Independent) Parachute Brigade Signal Company
- 2 (Independent) Parachute Field Workshop Company (EME)
- 252 (Para) Air Defence Battery
- 50th (Independent) Parachute Brigade Provost Section

The President's Bodyguard also forms part of the brigade as the pathfinders company.

It is interesting to note that the 50th Parachute Brigade is something of a hybrid. Whilst Western Parachute Regiments – most notably the British 'Paras' – are airborne light infantry, the Soviets

Army soldiers conduct a drill using the HAL Dhruv helicopter at the Army Day parade in New Delhi on 15 January 2013. Pinaka MBRL can be seen in the background. (MoD)

and now the Russians, have evolved their airborne units as airborne mechanised infantry. The Indian paratroopers were initially organised as light infantry but with the attachment of BMP-2 ICVs, standard 105mm LFG guns and their associated equipment, one may legitimately ask whether some genuflection towards the greater firepower and staying power of mechanised units is being bestowed upon India's Parachute Brigade. 50 Para Brigade has the potential to become a viable rapid reaction unit with sufficient staying power for regional operations.

The five airborne infantry battalions of the Parachute Regiment rotate to form part of the 50 PARA Brigade, alternatively serving their field tenures in counter-insurgency operations or high altitude areas. One of the eight Special Forces battalions serves in the brigade on rotation. One of the two field artillery regiments (9 PARA Field Regiment and 17 PARA Field Regiment) also form part of the brigade whilst the other serves out its field tenure on rotation. These artillery regiments are equipped with 105mm LFG guns whilst a number of BMP-2 ICVs are also available for paradropping operations as part of the Regiment. The 252 AD Battery uses Igla-1M man-portable SAMs. The Parachute Brigade and the PARA Special Forces now make extensive use of the IMI Tavor, various Kalashnikov variants, PKM and Negev Machine guns and have ample ATGM support with Milan, Konkurs and Spike missiles.[12]

The Parachute Regiment, and 50 Para Brigade in particular, forms the core of India's Rapid Reaction Force and has the ability to mobilise quickly to respond to situations which might arise even outside of India. This was demonstrated to dramatic effect in 1988 when elements of 50 Para Brigade took part in *Operation Cactus* in the Maldives, at the request of the latter's government to ward off a coup launched by Tamil mercenaries. This involved a combined services operation with the IAF and Navy ably supporting the 50 Para Brigade.

Operation Cactus – the PARAs Finest Hour

Whilst the Indian Air Force managed to quickly muster its assets for the operation, the preparations of the 50th PARA Brigade were bedevilled by a series of unfortunate events. Major Vinod Bhatia of the brigade had to inform Lieutenant General Rodrigues of the problems facing the three battalions attached to the brigade with 7 PARA on exercise, 6 PARA guarding the Central Ordnance Depot and 3 PARA guarding the Command HQ in Lucknow. Bhatia, after his conversation with Rodrigues, began to issue orders for a general recall of all personnel from the three battalions in the hope that a single full battalion could be constituted. He sought assistance from Agra's hotels for maps and brochures about the Maldives.[13]

Bhatia was concerned about being unable to meet the request for a battalion group to be ready to emplane by 1230 hrs, much less Rodrigues's additional request that entire brigade, minus the emplaned battalion group, be ready to move to the Maldives on the night of 3 November – early morning of 4 November. The initial appreciation indicated that the opposition would be in company plus strength and armed with the full range of small arms, rocket launchers and even MANPADS. To meet this threat, Bhatia was faced with a request that he simply could not meet in the available time. He noted that the request was for the following:[14]

- The full Brigade was to move to the Maldives.
- One Battalion group to emplane by 1230 hours (i.e., less than 2 hours).
- The Brigade, less one battalion group, to move to the Maldives on night 03/04 November.
- Prepare for an airborne assault on an island, para drop planned on a beach.
- The enemy is equipped with small arms, rocket launchers, mortars and general-purpose machine guns.
- There is no air defence, though the enemy may possess some surface-to-air missiles.
- Air effort allotted is three IL-76 and ten AN 32 aircraft.
- First and second-line ammunition to be carried.

Recognising the challenges before him, Bhatia informed the Brigade CO, Brigadier F. Bulsara who appreciated the problem. His own personal relationship with General Sharma helped ease the tensions that had built but he faced very real practical issues, not least of which being that he had no knowledge of the Maldives as there were no military maps of the region.

While 6 PARA was being mobilised and 7 PARA being recalled, 3 Para's CO, Colonel K.L. Sharma was reconnoitring a drop zone for an upcoming airborne exercise and thus 3 PARA would form part of any follow up action, later to be joined by 7 PARA, if the need arose. However, the bigger concern was whether a full battalion paradrop could be achieved in the event that it became necessary

Despite the chaos and muddled state of preparations, the initial intervention force began to take shape. The infantry component would be comprised of 6 PARA with C-Company acting as the pathfinder company, being paradropped if necessary. A company from 3 PARA was added under Major N.K.S. Ghei and the rest of 3 PARA was prepared for deployment in a second wave. The brigade was concerned about the possibility of having to conduct demolition operations, bridging, repair and even a need to supply boats to cross from Hulhule to Male or vice versa. A platoon of 411 PARA Field Company (Engineers) was prepared for action, again with parachute qualified personnel being selected for the operation. Artillery support was in decent shape with six 75/24 pack howitzers and personnel from two batteries of 17 PARA Field Regiment were ready for deployment. This would provide the intervention forces with a reasonably well-balanced force that should have been capable of landing and achieving its objectives.

Eventually, the Indian deployment in the first 24 hours would entail 1,650 personnel who, in addition to their normal combat package, also brought with them some four jeeps fitted with 106mm M40A1 recoilless rifles, seven 84mm Carl Gustav rocket launchers, seven medium machine guns, seven mortars – both 51mm and possibly 81mm. There was also at least, according to one account, 11 RPGs, which were not a standard weapon in the Indian military and 16 other vehicles.[15]

Supporting this was an equally impressive air effort, given the circumstances and other commitments. Some four Il-76s were committed to the operation, joined later by a fifth. These were used either in support of the 50th PARA Brigade but also in supporting the four Mirage 2000H aircraft that were deployed to Trivandrum. These were augmented by some 25 of 30 available AN-32 transports, four Mi-8 helicopters and, rather surprisingly, at least two Canberra bombers which were deployed to Trivandrum along with the Mi-8s and Mirage 2000s.[16]

Two Il-76s, with two reinforced paratroop rifle companies, covered the distance to Hulhule relatively peacefully. There was no untoward incident on the flight. However, operational secrecy was of extreme importance. To this end, the Air Traffic Control tower at Trivandrum airport was officially informed that a single aircraft – 'Friendly One' – was on a routine flight from Agra to Trivandrum. The second aircraft, 'Friendly Two', maintained radio silence and flew one kilometre behind the lead aircraft with its navigation lights switched off. They kept this position for four hours and passed over Trivandrum at 37,000 feet and it was only then when the controller at Trivandrum realised that they were diverting elsewhere. He was told the reasons and was ordered to keep it secret.[17]

An Indian Army paratrooper with the 50th Independent Para Brigade examines an M4 carbine prior to sighting in the weapon 4 May 2013, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He and fellow paratroopers are familiarising themselves with the American weapons in preparation for field training exercises with U.S. Army paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team during the annual Yudh Abyhas U.S. – India training exercise. (Sgt. Michael J. MacLeod)

Major Zahir of the Maldives National Security Service (NSS) was able to brief Major Dhillon of the PARA Brigade on the situation in Male and on the problems facing the NSS HQ which was under siege with a hole in its perimeter wall. While advising that the hole be blocked with sandbags, Dhillon assured Zahir that Indian troops would reach Male shortly and that Indian military assistance was on hand and being deployed. This eased apprehensions as the Indian Army and Air Force personnel took control of Hulhule airport, its airfield and Air Traffic Control (ATC) tower. Indian troops secured their landing zone and thereafter, ensured that there would be a safe spot for the landing of the units which followed.[18]

Brigadier Bulsara and High Commissioner Banerjee, together with an escort, arrived at the ATC tower. There the Maldivian ATC controllers established contact with President Gayoom who was in hiding. Reassuring the President that the Indian Army was on hand and that the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, conveyed his greetings, Bulsara advised President Gayoom that his troops

On the ground: 50 PARA Brigade troops with Maruti Gipsy jeeps mounted with ATGM teams and one BMP-2 AIFV. In the air: a HAL Dhruv helicopter supporting the Special Forces landing. (PTI)

Green Berets assigned to 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), conducted weapon training on 23 January, as part of a joint training exercise with Indian Special Operation Forces (PARA) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Camp Rilea, Oregon. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sergeant Marcus Butler)

would soon arrive to secure Male and would also arrive to ensure the President's safety. He then asked for persons trusted by Gayoom who could lead his troops to the President's location without fear of being compromised.[19]

At Gayoom's hideout, his bodyguards were naturally, very wary of a party of armed men coming to the door of the premises. Major Dhillon decided to move his Sikh troops to the front of his party so the Maldivian security personnel would realise that it would be very unlikely that these would be Tamil insurgents, even in disguise (Sikhs having distinctive beards and turbans). The security personnel let the Indian troops enter and found Gayoom, his wife and daughter, along with two trusted aides, hiding in the servants' quarters. Dhillon's presence and the greetings he reiterated from Rajiv Gandhi, reassured and relieved President Gayoom while Captain Singh gave some toffees to his eight year old daughter – a young lady who would one day become the foreign minister of the Maldives.[20]

With Dhillon having reached the President at 0145 hrs on 4 November 1988, Brigadier Bulsara was finally able to move out from Hulhule. He remained extremely concerned by the sporadic gunfire that was still erupting throughout Male. Accompanied by Major Bhatia and a team from 6 PARA, he went to meet President Gayoom. Major Dhillon, sharing concerns about Gayoom's safety, formed a human shield around Gayoom and they proceeded to a safer location. This turned out to be the HQ of the NSS which by now, had been secured and was manned by both Indian troops and NSS personnel with the insurgents having fled the scene.[21]

The Tamil mercenaries tried to escape and hijacked a civilian vessel, the *MV Progress Light*, but Indian naval assets had reinforced the PARAs on the Maldives and through a combination of effective naval gunfire and intimidation from naval aviation, were eventually captured. It was a successful operation.

This particular operation has been described in some detail as it demonstrates the ability of India's Special Forces Units to respond to unorthodox situations and remains, to date, one of India's biggest out of area deployments. Moreover, the Parachute Regiment is the parent entity of the PARA Special Forces Battalions, which have become the preferred option for India when difficult and unconventional military operations are required.

The PARA Special Forces Battalions[22]

The Para Commando units were created in 1966 by the Indian Army. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, a small ad hoc force comprising volunteers from most infantry units operated along and behind enemy lines. The performance of this force proved to the higher authorities that such forces had much utility and as such, there was greater emphasis placed on the raising of unconventional forces.

These units received some training in HALO operations, as did a select number of paratroopers.[23] However, whilst they were the first to be issued with night-vision and night-fighting gear, the Para Commando battalions were developing specialisations with one of the two battalions being tasked for mountain operations and the other, for operations in the desert. As more battalions were raised, they have all acquired their own specialisations. This has led to the PARA (SF) Battalions outnumbering the regular PARA battalions and becoming a force in their own right and with an ability to operate that is now independent from the Brigade.

The Paracommando battalions are increasingly in demand for highly skilled personnel to spearhead assaults on enemy positions. As a result, and owing to reorientation, the force was significantly expanded.

The list of PARA (SF) Battalions are:

- 1 PARA (SF)
- 2 PARA (SF)
- 3 PARA (SF)
- 4 PARA (SF)
- 9 PARA (SF)
- 10 PARA (SF)
- 11 PARA (SF)
- 21 PARA (SF)

The Ghatak Platoons

Additionally, the Ghatak Platoon, or Ghatak Commandos, are a special operations capable infantry platoon, one platoon attached to every infantry battalion in the Indian Army. They could be described as an elite group of infantry and acted as shock troops who spearheaded assaults ahead of the rest of the battalion. The role of the Ghatak Platoon was similar to that of the scout sniper platoon or STA platoon of the US Marine Corps, or the patrols platoon of the British Army. The Ghatak Platoon can be tasked by the battalion or brigade commander to carry out tasks which may include: special reconnaissance, raids on enemy artillery positions, airfields, supply dumps and tactical headquarters. They are also capable of directing artillery and air attacks on targets deep within enemy lines and have

Indian Army Special Operation Forces (PARA) train with 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers during Vajra Prahar 2018. The joint combined exercise builds interoperability and comradeship between the two forces and is designed to enhance the capabilities of both Indian and U.S. armies. (Sgt. John Conroy)

been equipped with laser-designator units for the guidance of laser-guided bombs.

A Ghatak Platoon was usually 20 strong and consisted of a commanding captain, two non-commissioned officers and some specialists like snipers and spotters, light machine gunners, medic and a radio operator. The remaining soldiers acted as assault troopers for the platoon. As might be expected, only the most physically fit and motivated soldiers in an infantry battalion were selected to be a part of the Ghatak Platoon. Additionally, it was mandatory for all of their officers to pass the commando training course.

The MARCOS or Marine Commandos

India has also deployed its Marine Commandos (MARCOS) in operations in Jammu and Kashmir and was specifically created for conducting special water-borne operations. The MARCOS are specially organised, trained and equipped for the conduct of special operations in a maritime environment. The unit is capable of operating in three mediums namely Sea, Air and Land. The core tasks of the MARCOS include:[24]

- Conducting clandestine attacks against enemy ships, offshore installations and other vital assets behind enemy lines.
- To support amphibious operations including pre-assault ops.
- To conduct unconventional warfare.
- Conducting surveillance and recce missions in support of military operations.
- Conducting clandestine diving operations.
- To conduct hostage rescue operations in maritime environments.

In 1986, the Indian Navy began establishing the predecessor of the MARCOS, the Indian Marine Special Force (IMSF) and its provisional commander, Lieutenant Arvind Singh and another officer completed training with US Navy SEALS. During Operation Pawan, the IMSF was to prove itself to be highly effective and conducted a number of operations to destroy LTTE speedboats and jetties.[25] This force is now deployed in Kashmir to neutralise terrorists operating on lakes.

The Indian Air Force Garuds

The Garuds are an Indian Air Force unit which was unveiled in February 2004. It primarily protects Indian Air Force installations from terrorist attacks.

Besides base protection force to protect airfields and key assets in hostile environments, some advanced Garud units are trained like Army PARA Commandos and the Naval MARCOS, to undertake missions deep behind enemy lines. Operations envisaged during hostilities include the Garuds undertaking combat search and rescue, saving of downed airmen and other forces from behind enemy lines, suppression of enemy air defence, radar busting, combat control, missile and munitions guidance (‘lasing’ of targets) and other missions in support of air operations. Apart from protecting air bases from sabotage and attacks by commando raids, they are also tasked to seal off weapons systems, fighter hangars and other major systems during intrusions and conflicts.[26]

The Garud Commando Force has a total present strength of approximately 1,080 airmen. Current plans call for the force to increase to 1,780.

Air support to India’s Special Forces is provided by the aircraft and helicopters of the Indian Air Force with new inductions such as the Chinook and C-130/C-17 augmenting Mi-17s and Russian transport aircraft. The activation of many Advanced Landing Grounds will assist in maintaining and reinforcing Indian formations along the LAC.

India’s Special Forces are also inducting new equipment for operations in high altitude and mountainous areas. Whilst the training and motivation levels of India’s Special Forces are unmatched, there are serious deficiencies in equipment which may prove to hinder their effectiveness in the long-term.

Nonetheless, despite their equipment shortcomings, the Indian Special Forces proved their worth when, as will be shown, they carried out the astonishing cross-LoC surgical strikes in 2016 and the cross-border strike against terrorists in Myanmar. In both, the Myanmar operations to strike militant camps and the POK mission to conduct surgical strikes on terror launch pads, the PARA (SF) units, supported by regular Army personnel conducted stunning raids into hostile territory.

New equipment in the form of new long-range sniper rifles and man-portable anti-tank weapon systems, to high-speed underwater scooters and hand-launched micro drones, is being inducted as India continues to gradually modernise its Special Forces. The Indian Special Forces seem to have standardised around a mix of Tavor, M4 and Kalashnikov variants for rifles, augmented by Negev LMGs and an increasing array of Western weapons, Indian optics and night-vision equipment, a mix of imported and Indian UAVs and missiles. The Special Forces, as is the case in many countries, are lavished with the best equipment that the country can afford and undertake joint exercises with foreign counterparts.

Ghatak commandos of an Infantry Battalion. The Ghatak is a reconnaissance platoon for employment in special operations. (PTI)

Planning the Response

There was little debate in India that there needed to be a robust response to the Uri terrorist attack and very quickly, all military and civilian authorities quickly decided upon a cross-LoC raid to destroy terrorist launchpads. This sent a message to the various terrorist groups that their safe havens were no longer particularly safe. The approach, having been tested during the Myanmar cross-border strike a year earlier, was particularly attractive to both the political decision makers and the army, as it would involve an operation across a boundary that did not have the sanctity of an international border. Furthermore, there was sufficient knowledge of the terrain and opposing forces in the region to allow for an excellent appreciation of the forces that would be facing the striking forces. Moreover, given the fact that the LoC, whilst heavily defended, was poorly protected by physical fencing or barriers (thanks to its disputed nature), any force would have a somewhat easier time of infiltrating across the frontier with a relatively good chance of avoiding detection. In addition, the Indian Army had ample artillery and support weapons to provide both cover for an infiltration, as well as a diversion.

Before giving clearance for any military operation, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, held a series of meetings with the three chiefs of India's armed forces – the Army, Navy and Air Force. One stark realisation was that despite efforts from 2014 onwards, the Army in particular, was still short of its desired ammunition reserves by a long margin with some critical munitions falling below the alarming threshold of 10 (I) – 10 days of intense combat or 30 days of normal combat. This became a matter of concern as any cross-LoC raid could potentially lead to a major military escalation.[27]

Parrikar, always a hands-on minister, moved to address concerns from the time he took office in 2014 but even with his efforts, normal methods of procurement were mind-numbingly slow. To speed things up, Parrikar began a series of fast-track procurements, giving the vice-chiefs of the respective services, additional financial powers to procure munitions and supplies. Even capital procurements, such as weapons systems to enable deficiencies, were to be made good as quickly as possible. By 2016, some deficiencies had been rectified and critical munitions had been replenished, although numbers of munitions were still in train for delivery.[28]

Northern Command was identified as being of particular importance – as opposed to the usual Western and Eastern Commands which were at the brunt of fighting in the past against Pakistan and China respectively. Therefore, procurement was directed to ensure that Northern Command received the best of equipment and stores. A disproportionate part of these new procurements – in particular UAVs, night-vision and night-fighting equipment and new small arms and support weapons – were directed towards the Special Forces Units which were being aggressively deployed in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. This meant that, of all the Army's units, the SF were the best equipped.

Where Parrikar really shone was in his ability to force the military to take decisions on action and his additional ability to get such action sanctioned by the Prime Minister. In

MARCOS deployed in Kashmir in November of 2011. (Ethanhunt47)

IAF Garud Commando during an exercise. Behind the soldier is an IAFl Mi-17 transport helicopter. (MoD)

this case, sensing the desire for action and an active response on the part of India, Parrikar left the planning of the operation to the Indian Army's Northern Command which was to meticulously plan for a cross-LoC raid. It was acutely aware of the need to manage expectations, results and, most importantly, to manage escalation. This was duly done while the political directorate began preparing to take action.[29]

The first steps towards retaliation began on 19 September when Northern Command started its preparations. Lieutenant General Deepak Hooda was given overall charge of planning and in consultation with the two battalion Commanding Officers of the two PARA (SF) units assigned to the task – 9 PARA (SF) and 4 PARA (SF) – Hooda began meticulous planning for the cross-LoC operation. This also included incorporation of Ghatak platoons from the battalions affected by the Uri terror attack.[30]

Politically, Prime Minister Modi was strongly in favour of a military response. He was now under severe political pressure from the Opposition which sought to capitalise politically on the terrorist attack, following Modi's attempts at rapprochement with Pakistan, as discussed in the previous chapter. Modi considered additional political and diplomatic methods of pressuring Pakistan, including trade restrictions, revisiting the provisions of the Indus Water Treaty and further reducing diplomatic relations between the two countries. All of these were standard Indian responses and after a while, it appeared that the Modi government would be no different to Dr. Singh's administration in its weak response to Pakistani terrorist attacks on Indian targets. Indeed, Modi found himself mocked and viciously ridiculed for his apparent 'meekness'. That assessment was to be proved wrong in a most dramatic fashion.[31]

In fact, it appears that Prime Minister Modi made up his mind some five days after the Uri attack. By 23 September, he was very clear on the nature and type of response that would be forthcoming in retaliation for the attack. At a detailed briefing from the NSA, Ajit Doval and the military leadership, Modi gave clearance for Northern Command to conduct a cross-LoC operation against terrorist launching pads in POK. Orders were given to identify possible targets and plan an operation to neutralise such infrastructure, with the strike teams exfiltrating successfully.[32]

However, it should be noted that this would not have been the first time that Indian troops had crossed the LoC but it was a very rare occurrence outside of general war. Veteran journalist, and military analyst, Sandeep Unnithan, then of *India Today* wrote:

> Indian military commanders have chafed at their inability to strike at militant sanctuaries just across the border. At the height of the Kargil war in 1999, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee issued orders to his military commanders that the LoC was sacrosanct. This, when military advice indicated that the war could have been terminated even sooner had India struck Pakistan's supply routes and bases across the LoC. Vajpayee, however, wanted India to retake the Kargil Heights from a moral high ground.
>
> War apart, cross-border operations across the LoC have been commonplace for decades, part of establishing 'moral ascendancy' over the adversary and conducted at the battalion level. The November 2003 ceasefire between India and Pakistan drastically reduced such operations, but they began a decade ago when both armies began targeting each other in a cycle of violence and counter-violence.
>
> Army officials privately admit to at least two cross-border SF raids in 2008 and 2011. But these were authorised by the Northern Command in retaliation to specific action by Pakistan Army Border Action Teams.[33]

In 2016, however, what was being contemplated was something very different. It was intended as a strike aimed at responding to a Pakistan based and backed terrorist attack. It was a response that the Indian Army had long sought to give.

Modi, however, stipulated that any response would have to come after a speech about to be delivered by then, External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, at the United Nations General Assembly. It was his intention that this speech was to give a context and cover for India's pending action to the international community. His use of this speech was masterful as Swaraj was able to contextualise and articulate India's anger and frustration brilliantly.[34] In this regard, one saw some signs of Modi's approach to national security which saw an integration of diplomatic and economic efforts into his government's broader security agenda, though not to the exclusion of more robust military methods.

On 26 September 2016, Sushma Swaraj delivered a powerful speech to the UN General Assembly which included the following lines:

> The Prime Minister of Pakistan also said that India has placed pre-conditions for talks which are not acceptable to him. What pre-conditions? Did we impose any pre-condition before extending an invitation for the oath-taking ceremony of our Government? Did we impose any pre-condition when I went to Islamabad for the Heart of Asia conference and agreed to begin the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue? Did we impose any pre-condition when Prime Minister Modi travelled from Kabul to Lahore? What pre-conditions? We took the initiative to resolve issues not on the basis of conditions, but on the basis of friendship! We have in fact attempted a paradigm of friendship in

> the last two years which is without precedent. We conveyed Eid greetings to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, wished success to his cricket team, extended good wishes for his health and wellbeing. Did all this come with pre-conditions attached? And what did we get in return? Pathankot, Bahadur Ali, and Uri. Bahadur Ali is a terrorist in our custody, whose confession is a living proof of Pakistan's complicity in cross-border terror. But when confronted with such evidence, Pakistan remains in denial.[35]

Swaraj, in this single speech, laid down Indian anger, frustration and efforts to coexist peacefully with Pakistan. Speeches like this had been made before but by citing three specific examples post 2015, Swaraj cast this starkly in terms of Prime Minister Modi's efforts to deal with Pakistan and Pakistan's terrorist response. Indirectly, this echoed Indian anger after the 1999 Lahore Declaration was followed by the Kargil War. Whether Swaraj was playing to a foreign audience or not is somewhat unclear. However, her words had resonance with the Indian public which now found itself wondering what was going to happen. The answer would come two days later.

Preparing for the Attack

Before the troops were dispatched across the LoC, the Indian Chief of Army Staff, General Dalbir Singh Suhag, sought permission from Defence Minister Parrikar to place several formations of the Indian Army on a higher state of alert. He was concerned that Pakistan might choose to escalate hostilities, not just along the LoC but also along the International Border. To this end, units in Punjab and Rajasthan were placed on alert whilst additional forces were used to reinforce both Indian troops along the LoC as well as strengthening the counter-insurgency grid in the Kashmir Valley.[36]

As far as the planning of the cross-LoC operation was concerned, one thing that stands out was the lack of political interference in the process. All concerned noted that once an option had been selected, after 'long and deliberate discussions', Modi left all planning to the professionals. The Indian Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) was tasked with providing intelligence, whilst General Dalbir Singh Suhag and NSA Doval, along with Defence Minister Parrikar were tasked with analysing the overall situation. Along with subject matter specialists, they evaluated available intelligence reports even as the operational units prepared their plans for action.[37]

In addition, R&AW operatives were tasked with gauging possible Pakistani responses to any Indian operation across the LoC. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) was tasked with keeping a watch on local terrorist and insurgent groups to thwart terrorist attacks that might be launched as either retaliation for Indian action or in sympathy with their fellow terrorists. The Jammu and Kashmir Police and the CAPFs in the Kashmir Valley and Jammu were also placed on heightened alert to deal with possible organised civilian unrest and systematic terrorist attacks.

Northern Command was given instructions to find terrorist camps in POK which might conceivably be targeted by Special Forces. They were specifically told to look for camps which might be valuable enough to Pakistan that their destruction would be felt by the ISI and by the terrorist groups themselves. Further instructions were given that Northern Command was to try to gather as many HUMINT resources to augment its own UAVs and satellite imagery and photo reconnaissance provided by the Indian Air Force and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) along with the R&AW's own air wing, the Aviation Research Centre (ARC).

Smt. Sushma Swaraj taking charge as the Union Minister for External Affairs, in New Delhi on May 28, 2014. (MEA)

Eventually, with the full support of the Indian intelligence community, four targets were selected. These were four terrorist launching pads, near to the LoC and whilst co-located with some Pakistan Army assets, were close enough to the Indian side of the LoC to allow for relatively easy access by the strike teams. However, this also meant that there was an increased risk of detection as Pakistani forces, as well as those of their terrorist proxies, were on heightened alert in the period after the Uri terror attack. In this regard, India's 10 day delay in responding fostered complacency, with alert levels being relaxed after about a week as India seemed to be adopting its usual approach and response to the terror strikes.

However, during this time, the target options were being discussed with a tabulation of targets, locations, potential hostiles, casualty prospects and requirements for logistics and other support. This gave both planners and the Commanders of 9 PARA (SF) and 4 PARA (SF), the information required to plan for achieving success at a minimal cost of Indian casualties. The latter point cannot be overemphasised as the political and diplomatic fallout could be severe and definitely embarrassing for the Indian government.[38]

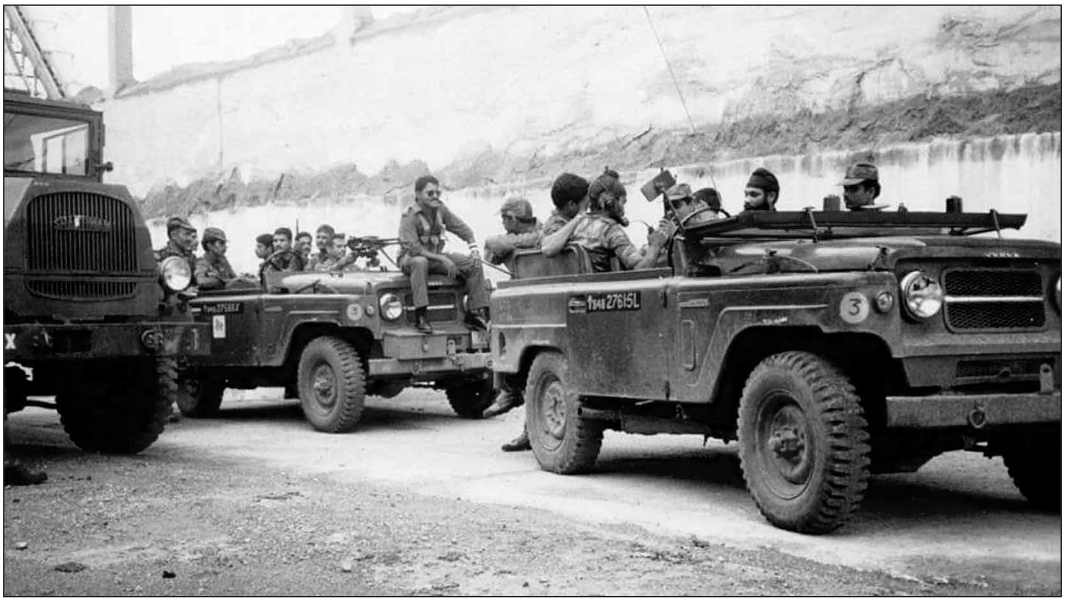
Three Special Forces teams were assigned to strike four targets in POK. One team was assigned two targets, separated by only 500 metres. These sites were located relatively close to Indian Army positions at Uri and were suspected as being used to launch the terror attack on the base. The other two teams were assigned one target each. Two of the targets were in the general vicinities of the Kanna area opposite Indian positions at Nangi Tekri and Balnui whilst the other two were in the general area of Kel and Lipa.[39]

In total, some seven launchpads were targeted at the four targets. These included six launchpads at Kel, Lipa, Athmuqam, Tattapani and Bhimber with another at Roshni. The first six pads were located within five kilometres of the LoC while the one at Roshni was located some distance further into POK.[40] These launchpads, whilst holding significant numbers of terrorists, are not large or well-built entities and are easy to destroy. Once attacked, the sites would not be particularly difficult to destroy and are therefore, not particularly difficult to rebuild.

The Surgical Strikes

The first most Indians heard of the operation that would popularly be termed 'The Surgical Strikes' was from a press conference from the Director of General Military Operations, Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh on 29 September 2016, which stated the following:

> It has been a matter of serious concern that there has been continuing and increasing infiltration by terrorists across LoC in Jammu and Kashmir. This is reflected, amongst others, in the



9 PARA (SF), Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, Circa 1987-1990. At that time the Jonga (Indian version of the Nissan Patrol) was the standard vehicle of this special force. (Indian Army)

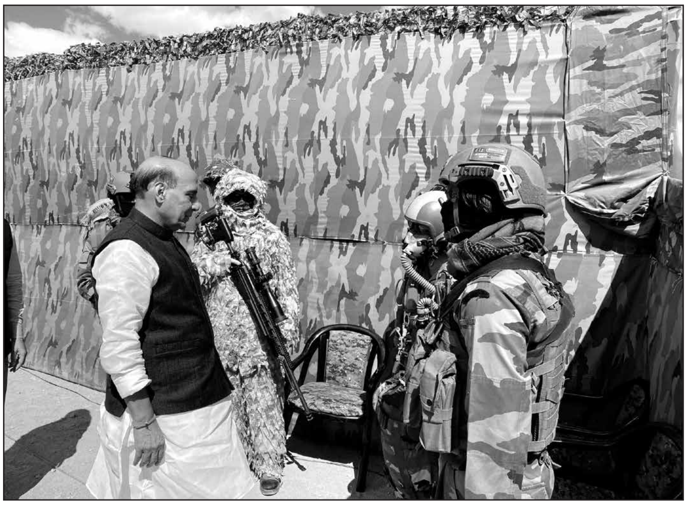
> terrorist attacks on 11 and 18 September 2016 in Punch and Uri respectively. Almost 20 infiltration attempts have also been foiled by the Army at, or close to, the LoC during this year.
>
> During these terrorist attacks and infiltration attempts, we have recovered various stores including GPS and items that clearly indicate their origins in Pakistan. Furthermore, captured terrorists hailing from Pakistan or Pakistan Occupied Kashmir have confessed to their training and arming in Pakistan or territory under its control. The matter had been taken up at highest diplomatic levels and through military channels. India has also offered consular access to these apprehended terrorists for Pakistan to verify their confessions. Furthermore, we had proposed that fingerprints and DNA samples of terrorists killed in Punch and Uri could be made available to Pakistan for investigation.
>
> Despite our persistent urging that Pakistan respect its January 2004 commitment for not allowing its soil or territory under its control to be used for terrorism against India, there has been no let-up in infiltration and terrorist actions from across the LoC. If damage was limited, this was primarily due to the efforts of our soldiers deployed in our multi-tiered counter-infiltration grid that has been effective in neutralising infiltrating terrorists. The Indian armed forces have been extremely vigilant in the face of this continuing threat.
>
> Based on receiving specific and credible inputs that some terrorist teams had positioned themselves at launch pads along LoC to carryout infiltration and conduct terrorist strikes inside Jammu and Kashmir and in various metros in other states, the Indian Army conducted surgical strikes at several of these launch pads to pre-empt infiltration by terrorists. The operations were focused on ensuring that these terrorists do not succeed in their design to cause destruction and endanger the lives of our citizens.
>
> During these counter-terrorist operations, significant casualties were caused to terrorists and those providing support to them. The operations aimed at neutralising terrorists have since ceased. We do not have any plans for further continuation. However, the Indian armed forces are fully prepared for any contingency that may arise.
>
> I have been in touch with Pakistan Army DGMO and have informed him of our actions. It is India's intention to maintain peace and tranquillity in the region. But we cannot allow the terrorists to operate across the LoC with impunity and attack citizens of our country at will. In line with Pakistan's commitment in January 2004 not to allow its soil or territory under its control to be used for attacks against India, we expect the Pakistani Army to cooperate with us to erase the menace of terrorism from the region.[41]

The operation itself – to date it has not received a formal code-name – was short, sharp and within its limits, very effective in sending the requisite message to Pakistan and its terrorist network. It was also a small operation – no more than 100 personnel were involved. These included teams of approximately 25 men each from 9 PARA (SF) and 4 PARA (SF) with another 50 personnel from the Ghatak Platoons of 6 Bihar and 10 Dogra. The inclusion of the latter units was to give the two battalions a chance at participating in the retaliation for their losses at Uri and whilst not of the same standard as the PARA (SF), the Ghataks were good support for the SF units. In addition to their natural desire for vengeance, the Ghatak platoons of 10 Dogra and 6 Bihar were also, being based in the area, intimately familiar with the terrain and as such, were to prove very useful as guides and advisors to the PARA (SF) operatives. In addition, they were excellent combat support troops, able to operate effectively alongside elite commando units.

The operation, cleared by Prime Minister Modi on 27 September, began on the night of 28 September and lasted until the early hours of 29 September. Journalist Sandeep Unnithan, in his superb work for *India Today* described the operation in the following way:

> On the night of September 28, close to 100 specially trained operators exhaled gently as they lay in wait at multiple locations across the LoC. The moon had waned to a thin, near-invisible crescent. Until H-hour, the cutting edge of the Indian Army's Parachute regiment Special Forces, PARA SF for short, did not exist. They blended into the rugged topography because they had reduced their four S-es-shape, shine, silhouette and smell. Their combat fatigues blended into the forest, their faces were streaked with camouflage paint. Their skin was covered in a thin film of mud to suppress body odour. Their weapons had been blackened. They had lain in ambush for over 48 hours …
>
> At H-hour, a coded signal went out to the teams. The operators opened up with the portable artillery they had backpacked across the LoC-Carl Gustaf rocket launchers, thermobaric rockets, under barrel grenade launchers clipped on rifles and 'Milkor' multiple grenade launchers that spat out six 40mm grenades in one pull of the trigger.
>
> Six launchpads at Kel, Lipa, Athmuqam, Tattapani and Bhimber, located within five kilometres of the LoC, were hit near-simultaneously. The explosions were captured on hand-held cameras and by Indian Army drones floating above, relaying

The Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh briefing the media on the terrorist attack at Army Camp in Uri, Jammu and Kashmir on 19 September 2016. (MoD)



Para SF operators along with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in Ladakh, July 2020. The operator on the left is armed with a Finnish SAKO sniper rifle. (MoD)

the images back to base. At each location, the operation was terminated in minutes.

It was a destruction mission, they did not engage their targets with small arms fire nor wait to count casualties', one official says. The weapons were chosen to inflict the maximum structural damage. The Russian Shmel, for instance, is called a flame-thrower by its manufacturer as it ignites a fuel-air mix that collapses structures and has the impact of one 155mm Bofors shell.

The commandos had accomplished a textbook 'raid' after infiltrating enemy-held territory. The US Special Forces Operational Techniques' field manual FM 31-20, one of the few such documents that is publicly accessible, hails overland infiltration 'as the most secure way of getting the Special Forces team into place, especially if time is not crucial. Distance is not necessarily a problem for well-equipped Special Forces personnel, trained to use their skills, wits and resources.[42]

Whilst the Indian strike teams quite literally, walked into POK to hit their targets, it should be noted that this is not altogether surprising. Infiltration across the LoC is far from impossible and whilst both sides try to interdict infiltration as much as practical, there is little doubt that with targets only a few kilometres from their own posts, the Indian SF teams found that through the use of GPS systems and guided by a UAV, they were able to circumvent many of the Pakistani positions and reach their targets undetected by either the Pakistanis or the Jihadist terrorists.[43]

However, the exfiltration of Indian troops was not without incident. During the deinduction of the commando teams, two soldiers stepped on landmines and were injured, though not fatally or severely.

The photos show the 17 Indian military victims of the terrorist attack in Url in 2016. (MoD)

The Impact

Pakistan went out of its way to deny that any such Indian raid had happened, taking journalists on a choreographed tour of some areas along the LoC, not even remotely in the vicinity of the Indian raids. This pattern of impact denial would become a hallmark of Pakistani reaction to Indian actions in response to terrorist attacks. The nature of the terrain and the temporary nature of the terrorist launchpads also meant that concealment of any damage could be done with relative ease given a few hours. However, other evidence suggests that considerable damage and casualties were inflicted.

Indian UAVs captured much imagery of the strike and this imagery plus visual evidence from cameras carried by the commandos. Sandeep Unnithan notes:

> In what is believed to be a first for such missions, the operators took visual evidence of the strike. One team waited until daybreak, past 6 am, to capture a camp being blown up on video. The infrared bloom in one of the launchpads led the brass to wonder whether the operators had hit a weapons dump. The footage was carefully analysed by army and intelligence sources and shown to the leadership before India went public with the strike.[44]

Casualty estimates, which Indian officers themselves admit are more likely to be guesstimates based on the number of terrorists at each site, suggest that upwards of 30 terrorists were killed, though some estimates put the figure as low as about a dozen. In addition, two Pakistani soldiers were killed.[45]

The real impact of the 'surgical strikes' was a shift in expectation. The Indian public now expected the Indian government to respond aggressively to terrorist provocations. Pakistan also now anticipated a more rigorous response from India and as such, they began to shift camps away from the LoC to avoid such an Indian response in the future.

In the aftermath of the cross-LoC raid in response to the Uri terror attack, the Indian military realised the need for a unified Special Operations Command. In 2018, Prime Minister Modi took the first steps towards the creation of a Special Operations Command.[46]

After nearly a decade of debate, a great deal of indecision and at times, near paralysis in policy making, India's armed forces finally established the Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD) in May 2019.[47]

Given the fact that the Special Forces of the Indian Army have been at the forefront of actions to counter Pakistan's proxy war along the LoC and elsewhere, the AFSOD was a welcome step in the direction of establishing a true joint-approach to Special Forces operations in India. The AFSOD seems to have been very much a product of the Uri and Myanmar operations where the utility of Special Forces was demonstrated beyond all doubt.

The Indian armed forces finally realised a long desired goal of a tri-service special operations division (the AFSOD) in May 2019. This division, which was hoped would eventually emerge into a full-fledged tri-service command, was headed by a PARA (SF) veteran, Major General A.K. Dhingra and initially had some 3,000 combat personnel attached to it. As the force evolved, more troops would eventually be attached.

The concept of the AFSOD was tested in Exercise Smelling Field in Gujarat in September 2019 with a few also identifying any problems that the division might face in its initial period. As the idea for a separate Special Forces Command had been around since 2011, it has been a long time in the making for the realisation of this initial step towards effective synergy of the armed forces' Special Forces. These have grown numerically and in experience and are still moving towards achieving their potential.

Yet, this development would not have been possible had it not been for the performance of the Special Forces Units in the aftermath of the Uri attacks. For the first time, besides having the 50 PARA Brigade as a rapid reaction force, the Indian government now had a viable force for operations behind enemy lines, able to conduct strikes against targets and successfully exfiltrating from hostile territory. Indeed, in many ways, the post-Uri cross-LoC raid marked the coming of age for India's Special Forces and since then, they have remained an important military option.

5

THE PULWAMA ATTACK AND OPERATION BANDAR

On 14 February 2019, an Indian convoy consisting of 78 vehicles and 2,500 CRPF personnel was moving along the NH 44 highway which connects the cities of Jammu and Srinagar. At about 1515 hrs IST, at Lethpora near Awantipora, one of the buses in the convoy was rammed by a car in which a suicide bomber, Adil Ahmad Dar, from the terrorist group JEM, detonated an explosive charge of 300kg, killing 40 CRPF soldiers of the 76th Bn CRPF. This was the largest attack on Indian security forces since 1989. Though there had been attacks on security forces, the magnitude of the attack was staggering.[1]

JEM claimed responsibility for the attack shortly after the incident and although Pakistani officials condemned and denied any involvement in the attack, the fact that the leader of the JEM, Mazoor Azhar, lives and operates with impunity in Pakistan, belied any suggestion of Pakistani innocence in the affair.[2] Having set a precedent for retaliation in 2016, after the Uri attack killed 19 soldiers, there was little doubt that the pressure on India to respond, was huge.

The next day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India would give a 'strong response' to the attack in Pulwama. He rightly stated that 'the blood of the people is boiling' and that the perpetrators of the terrorist act would pay dearly for what they did. Modi did not directly blame Pakistan but spoke out saying that 'if our neighbours think it can destabilise India through its tactics and conspiracies, they are mistaken'. Anger increased when a video of Dar boasting about his terror plans emerged, replete with repugnant references to Hindus.

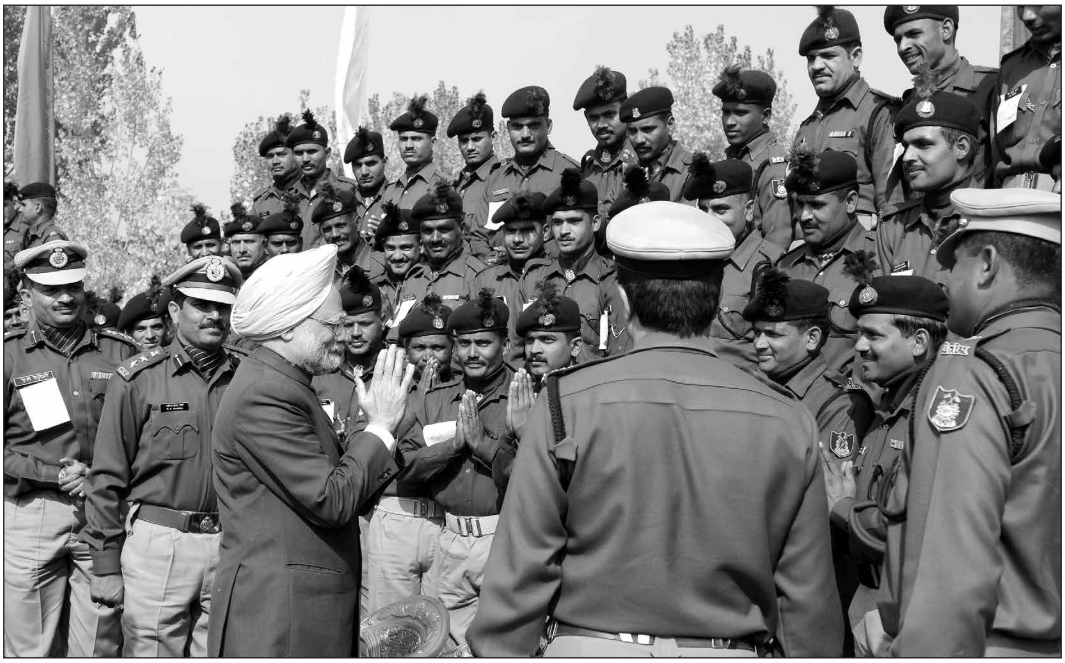
American condemnation was also swift. The White House's official statement was that it hoped that 'Pakistan will immediately end giving support and refuge to all terrorist groups that act within its territory'.[3] A little later, Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley gave a press conference saying Modi had initiated measures to promote 'diplomatic isolation with Pakistan'. Jaitley also said India had 'indisputable evidence' about Pakistan's involvement in the Pulwama bombing.

There was, of course, an understandable outpouring of rage in India with protests and candle-light vigils being held for the CRPF casualties and their families. Many underestimate the patriotism of the average Indian citizen but rich or poor, they are fiercely committed to their country. This found resonance as various bodies tried to raise money for the families of the deceased soldiers. Moreover, Indian cinema and television associations – where many Pakistani artistes found work in India's thriving entertainment sector – announced an immediate boycott of Pakistani artistes.[4] Furthermore, on a more official level, India rescinded Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation trading status and hiked import duties on Pakistani products to 200 percent.

In response to the Pulwama terrorist attack, the entire counter-insurgency grid in the Kashmir Valley was activated and teams of personnel from the military, CAPFs and the Jammu and Kashmir Police began to seek out and kill JEM terrorists in the valley. Only four days after the murderous terrorist attack and following intelligence reports, on February 18, in the early hours of the morning, a joint team of from 55 RR, the CRPF and the Special Operations Group of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, cornered and killed two JEM terrorists and two JEM sympathisers (who provided shelter to the terrorists), in a search operation. It later transpired that one of them, Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, also known as Kamran, was identified as a Pakistani citizen, a commander within the JEM and allegedly, the mastermind of the Pulwama attack. The other JEM terrorist killed in the encounter was Hilal Ahmed, a local recruit. Four Indian personnel were killed in the assault.[5]

India's campaign against the terrorists responsible for the Pulwama attack continued for years, with four out of five principal players being killed by July 2019 and one other being arrested. Furthermore, of the total of 19 JEM terrorists involved, seven were arrested and eight killed, with four others fleeing to Pakistan. The last of the terrorists to be killed was Samir Dar, who was killed in January 2022.[6]

However, even this prompt and decisive action to neutralise the JEM terrorists involved in the planning of the attack was not enough to satisfy an Indian public that was enraged. The funerals



The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, greeting the CRPF and BSF soldiers at the Sainik Sammelan, in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on 29 October 2009. (PMO)

J&K Police and Emergency units at the site of the attack in Pulwama. (PIB)

Chilas
Kupwara
Bandipur
Baramula
Wular Lake
Khalsi
Leh
Yusmarg
Aharbal
Naoshera
Akhnur

Adil Ahmad Dar, JEM's suicide bomber. Killed at just 22 years of age, Dar lived 10 km from the attack site in Pulwama. (PIB)

of the CRPF soldiers killed in the attack, the footage of the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Rajnath Singh, standing with quiet dignity as the caskets carrying the bodies arrived in New Delhi and the anguish of the families of the deceased soldiers, all played on the collective psyche of the Indian public which demanded retribution. Into this volatile, but understandable, emotive mix, came the cold calculation, cynicism and very high stakes of India's electoral politics – something one US official described as a 'blood sport'.

Pulwama and Politics

Whilst the Modi government would probably have retaliated strongly, added pressure was placed on the government as the 2019 Indian General Elections were due to be announced. The ruling National Democratic Alliance coalition, led by Narendra Modi's BJP, had, in December 2018, suffered losses in three state elections – in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh – usually seen as bell-weather states for General elections. These losses were of considerable concern to the BJP and may have played heavily on the calculations as to the timing of the retaliation. It should also be noted that in India, once elections are called and the 'Model Code of Conduct' comes into effect, there are some restrictions on the functioning of many arms of the State. In theory this should not affect military or other security operations but in practice, some problems arise.

An image that has been repeated several times in recent Indian history: the funeral of a military man who was a victim of terrorist action while performing his duties. (MoD)

Rashtriya Rifles troops with the body of a dead terrorist. (PIB)

The Modi government was also under pressure from the Opposition which latched on to the attack as a sign that the Modi government was weak on internal security – a bit rich considering the number of terror attacks that took place prior to 2014 – and sought to capitalise on national anger against the attack on the CRPF. Sensing an opportunity to seize the initiative, Rahul Gandhi of the INC was relentless in targeting Modi for his seeming inaction on the Pulwama strike and many Opposition politicians called for immediate retaliation. The media, of course, was also tapping into the mood of the country and was quick to gauge the mood in favour of some sort of military response. The media built an expectation following the 'Surgical Strike' of 2016 after the Uri terror attack, that the Modi government would react decisively to this sort of provocation from across the border. In that sense, they were to be proved right though nobody could anticipate in full what eventually transpired.

Some judged the mood spectacularly wrong as at least one supposedly 'liberal' deputy

Samir Dar and other JEM terrorists involved in the Pulwama attack. (PIB)

news editor of the NDTV news channel – a channel known to be fiercely opposed to Narendra Modi – mocked the terror attack and ended up being suspended.[7] It was not competitive patriotism between parties but a genuine sense of anger and outrage that some in the anti-Modi media and intellectual space failed to understand or to appreciate. This had the effect of neutralising the Opposition's attacks on Modi for his alleged 'inaction' over the Pulwama attack. It also pushed 'liberal' voices into a political corner where they, in turn, were portrayed, perhaps somewhat unfairly, as being 'unpatriotic' and 'anti-national'. Not responding to the attack was not an option in an election year and as such, the Modi government had to respond quickly.

Whilst platitudes were exchanged and uttered by Pakistan and the larger global community, India began to examine its military options with the aim of sending a signal that terrorist attacks will not go unpunished, whilst limiting its actions to minimise the risk and attendant outrage, of killing Pakistani civilians. This quest for compromise was to complicate the options available to India and perhaps, the outcomes eventually achieved.

On 16 February 2019, following a long established pattern, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi invited India to investigate and share information on the group that perpetrated the attack with Pakistan. This did not meet with any enthusiasm from India since JEM had already claimed responsibility and Masood Azhar was living and thriving in Pakistan and enjoyed both the protection of and largesse from the Pakistani state. This did not convince India of Pakistan's bona fides in any investigation into the Pulwama attack.

Pakistan summoned the Indian High Commissioner to protest India's allegation against Pakistan and its involvement in the Pulwama attack.[8] This was a pattern to which India had long become accustomed and was ignored. Both countries subsequently withdrew their High Commissioners.

On 19 February 2019, Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Kham spoke in an address intended for citizens of both countries, saying that he hoped common sense would prevail and that India would not 'get stuck in the past', and that he was now running a 'new Pakistan' that no longer tolerated terrorist operations within its territory, warning that any Indian action would be immediately answered by the Pakistani government. This message did not go down well in India and in many ways, Khan's sermon had the opposite effect of further hardening India's position against Pakistan. In its public response to Khan's speech, the Indian government was scathing, stating: '… it is amazing that the Pakistani PM does not emphasise attacks on Indian police forces as a terrorist act'.

Internationally, the Chinese government, a close ally of Pakistan, called for dialogue between the parties whilst US President Donald Trump spoke on 23 February appreciating the gravity of the situation and expressed a desire to play a constructive role. Efforts to insert the UN into the affair by its Secretary General were rebuffed by India. International platitudes were not going to deter India from a vigorous response to the Pulwama attack.

Planning a Response

A day after the Pulwama attack, even as the scale of the loss of life became known, the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), the country's apex Cabinet level decision making body, met to discuss options. At the meeting, held on the morning of 15 February 2019, the CCS, headed by Prime Minister Modi and including the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Rajnath Singh, the Minister of Defence, Nirmala Sitharaman, the then Minister of Finance, the late Arun Jaitley and the Minister of External Affairs, the late Sushma Swaraj, was briefed by the Indian National Security Adviser (NSA), Ajit Doval.[9] All agreed that a response was necessary and that Pakistan needed to be pressured. A combination of diplomatic and economic pressure was an immediate first step but it was also evident that a military response of some kind would have been necessary beyond intensifying artillery bombardments across the LoC.

A number of possible military options were considered. These included coordinated military operations along the LoC to alter the de facto border, air strikes on targets suspected of being terrorist launching pads, a naval quarantine, a precision missile strike, using Brahmos missiles, against a suspected terrorist site in Pakistan, and another cross-LoC Special Forces strike of the kind that took place after the Uri terrorist attack in 2016.[10] These options, whilst all viable, opened the real possibility that a general war could take place between India and Pakistan, the consequences of which were unpredictable at best, as well as being politically unpalatable. As such, any response had to meet the requirement of being unlikely to escalate the situation into a state of general war and this of course precluded many of the proposed options, despite their evident attractions for India.

Eventually, India settled on an air strike. It represented India's first attempt to use offensive air power in a sub-conventional conflict against one of its neighbours. Inevitably, the possibility of such action raises the spectre of nuclear weapons use by Pakistan. This matter needs exploration as the risk of conventional escalation leading to a nuclear exchange, is one which could easily spiral out of control. Whilst potentially evident post the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the issue was very relevant as India weighed its military options – from a full-scale conventional strike to more limited action.

The Nuclear Dimension

Whilst India successfully carried out a cross-LoC Special Forces strike after the Uri terrorist attack, launching an air strike into Pakistan was a completely different operation. Though the Kargil war of 1999 showed that conventional war was distinctly possible, despite both countries being nuclear powers, Operation Parakram of 2002, showed that India was not able to mobilise quickly enough to force a short, sharp and decisive conflict. This was to change with the adoption of the so-called 'Cold Start' doctrine. Even as India contemplated a conventional large-scale attack on Pakistan, its own military doctrine and Pakistan's nuclear doctrine came into play.

The so-called 'Cold Start Doctrine' evolved after the 2001–2002 military stand-off following a series of Pakistani terrorist attacks, including one on the Indian Parliament. India's frustration at not being able to launch a swift military response, owing to its long mobilisation period, the Indian Army examined its doctrine with the hope of evolving one that would enable the country to achieve its political and military aims in a short war without running the risk of crossing Pakistan's nuclear red lines. The premise of the doctrine was based on two major elements: readjustments were carried out to enhance the offensive operations capability of 'Pivot' corps (previously designated Holding corps), so as to make it possible to launch offensive operations virtually from a 'cold start' to deny Pakistan the advantage of early mobilisation. In addition, plus Strike Corps cantonments were moved closer to the border, enabling them to deploy much more quickly.

The second element of the Cold Start doctrine envisages the fielding of a number of 'integrated battle groups' each of division size and raised from within existing forces. Each IBG would be capable of launching limited offensive operations to a shallow depth, to capture a long swathe of territory almost all along the international boundary. Any success achieved by the IBGs could be exploited by one or more Strike Corps, where possible, but without crossing Pakistan's nuclear red lines. India would then try to use the captured territory as a bargaining chip to force Pakistan to end its support to terrorist forces operating against India.[11]

The overall objective would be to destroy the Pakistan Army's war waging potential through the application of what Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal termed, 'asymmetric firepower' from ground forces (through long-range medium guns, rocket launchers, surface-to-surface and cruise missiles) and through concerted air strikes directed against Pakistani forces on the battlefield. Brigadier Kanwal notes that the logic behind the generation of massive asymmetries of firepower is necessary given the difficulties inherent in drawing into battle and destroying Pakistan's strategic reserves (Army Reserve North and Army Reserve South) through deep manoeuvres in a short, limited war. To this end, the most effective way of destroying these formations – which form the bulk of Pakistan's offensive capability – is through asymmetric firepower.[12]

The 2001–2002 stand-off taught the Indian Army many operational and logistics lessons. Undoubtedly, the most important lesson that emerged was the need to reduce the excessively long time period that India's three Strike Corps needed to mobilise for war. At the time, Kanwal argued, by the time the three Strike Corps were ready to be launched across the border, the international community had prevailed on India to give General Musharraf an opportunity to prove his sincerity in curbing cross-border terrorism.

In an interview with Praveen Swam, General S. Padmanabhan, India's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) during Operation Parakram stated, 'You could certainly question why we are so dependent on our strike formations … and why my holding Corps do not have the capability to do the same tasks from a cold start. This is something I have worked on while in office. Perhaps, in time, it will be our military doctrine…'[13]

Therefore, compared to the earlier doctrines, the perceived advantages of the Cold Start doctrine over its predecessor are fourfold. As Walter Ladwig III explains:

> First, forward-deployed division-sized units can be alerted faster and mobilised more quickly than larger formations. If the battle groups and the pivot corps start closer to the international border, their logistics requirements are significantly reduced, enhancing their manoeuvrability and their ability to surprise. Second, even though division-sized formations can 'bite and hold' territory, they lack the power to deliver a knockout blow. In the minds of Indian military planners, this denies Pakistan the 'regime survival' justification for employing nuclear weapons in response to India's conventional attack. Furthermore, under Cold Start, the Indian Army can undertake a range of responses to a given provocation rather than the all-or-nothing approach of the Sundarji doctrine. Third, multiple divisions, operating independently, have the

A BRAHMOS Missile laucher of joint Indian-Russian origin is on display in a parade on Indian Army Day, 15 January 2013. (Hemantphoto79) potential to disrupt or incapacitate the Pakistani leadership's decision making cycle'.[14]

In the opinion of Indian planners, when the Pakistani military is faced with offensive thrusts in as many as eight different sectors, it would be hard-pressed to determine where to concentrate its forces and which lines of advance to oppose. In a conflict of limited duration, India would be hard-pressed to leverage the numerical superiority of its conventional forces to achieve a decisive outcome as neither its qualitative nor quantitative superiority is overwhelming. To this end, increased emphasis is put on rapid mobilisation of forces in an effort to quickly attain realistic military objectives. Fourth, having an additional eight units – each of division size – plus three strike corps – capable of offensive action, significantly increases the challenge for Pakistani intelligence's limited reconnaissance assets to monitor the status of all the IBGs, improving the chance of achieving surprise.[15]

Since then, Indian Army planners have worked hard to reduce the mobilisation time and come up with a new doctrine for offensive operations that would achieve the desired military objectives without risking escalation to the nuclear level. However, Pakistan, being aware of Cold Start, tailored its nuclear doctrine, to try to minimise the effect of India's new approach.

Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine

Pakistan's nuclear posture and doctrine have moved from one of credible minimum deterrence to one of full-spectrum deterrence.[16] This has encompassed enhanced numbers of nuclear weapons, as well as the development of a doctrine that may allow for the employment of nuclear weapons as a tactical weapon in order to deal with a potential Indian incursion into Pakistani territory. It comes with the attendant risk of lowering the nuclear thresholds in the subcontinent.

This is combined with a relatively survivable force of long-range missile systems capable of targeting Indian cities and which could serve as a potential deterrent to massive Indian counter-value retaliation. Whilst Pakistan's doctrine dealing with TNWs will be dealt with in the relevant chapter, the country's nuclear red lines raise an important question as to whether Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is geared towards a tactical role or a strategic one:[17]

- Spatial: Indian armed forces occupying a large swathe of Pakistani territory;
- Military: Indian armed forces completely knocking out or comprehensively destroying a large part of the Pakistani armed forces;
- Economic: Any Indian attempt to economically strangle Pakistan;
- Political: Possibly, an attempt to militarily assist a secessionist movement in Pakistan to the extent that the said movement has a reasonable chance of success.

In the aforementioned scenarios, it is difficult to see how the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by Pakistan against Indian cities is viable, given the inevitability of heavy Indian retaliatory strikes with the consequent destruction of Pakistan. An examination of the Pakistani arsenal – in particular, its recent emphasis on shorter-range systems—suggests that Pakistan believes that its TNWs represent the most viable instrument towards ensuring that its nuclear red lines are not crossed.[18]

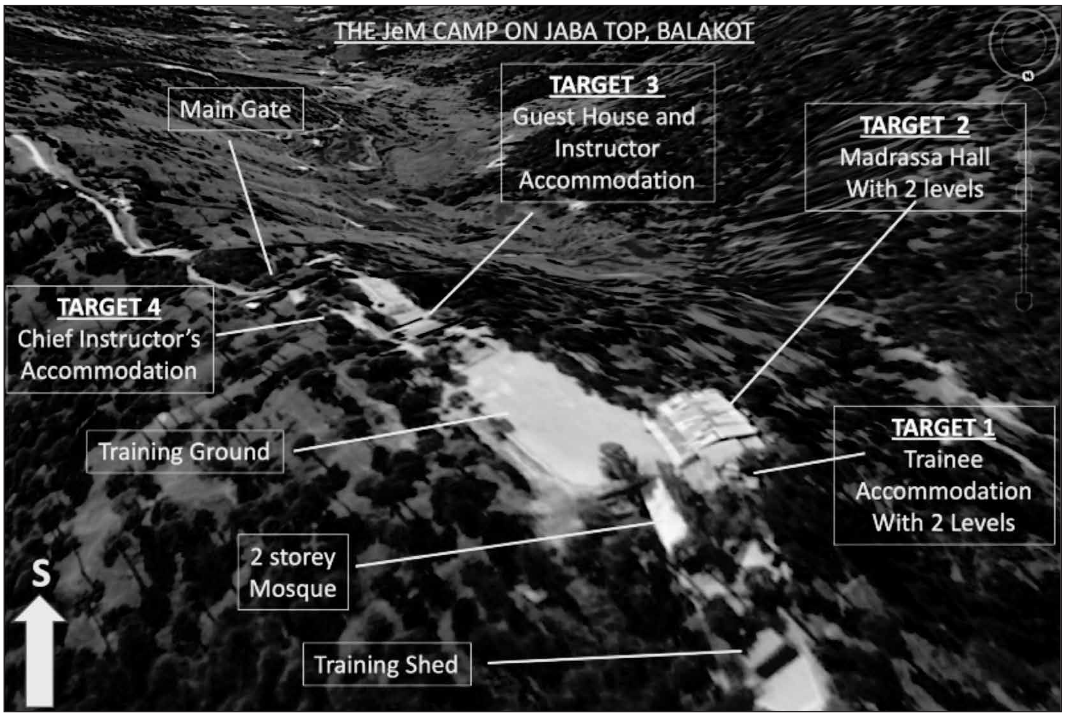
Pakistan has not spelt out either a counterforce or counter-value doctrine and its nuclear strategy seems to be geared towards blunting India's conventional military superiority. This might be used to retaliate for actions by Pakistani-assisted terrorist groups using the 'Cold Start' doctrine. However, Pakistan has not offered out a comprehensive doctrine nor has it detailed its thinking on either counterforce or counter-value targeting beyond its assertions that TNWs are intended as a response to India's 'Cold Start' doctrine.

This leads to the inevitable conclusion that Pakistan's nuclear doctrine seeks to ensure the continued viability of its sub-conventional

An Indian Army T-90S tank taking part in military manoeuvres. (cell105) terrorist campaign against India whilst blunting an Indian military response.

Furthermore, should the aforesaid response materialise, its TNWs might be employed so as to achieve a relatively favourable situation on the battlefield, preventing the destruction of Pakistani military capabilities whilst simultaneously being insured against Indian counter-value retaliation.

This is predicated on India reacting in precisely the manner Pakistan expects and conducting conventional military operations in a manner in which the likelihood of nuclear thresholds being crossed, became likely. However, this, as in the case much of the Pakistani nuclear doctrine, is fundamentally flawed in conception and does not cater for effective escalation limitation.


THE JeM CAMP ON JABA TOP, BALAKOT
Main Gate
TARGET 3
Guest House and Instructor Accommodation
TARGET 2
Madrassa Hall With 2 levels
TARGET 4
Chief Instructor's Accommodation
Training Ground
TARGET 1
Trainee Accommodation With 2 Levels
2 storey Mosque
S
Training Shed

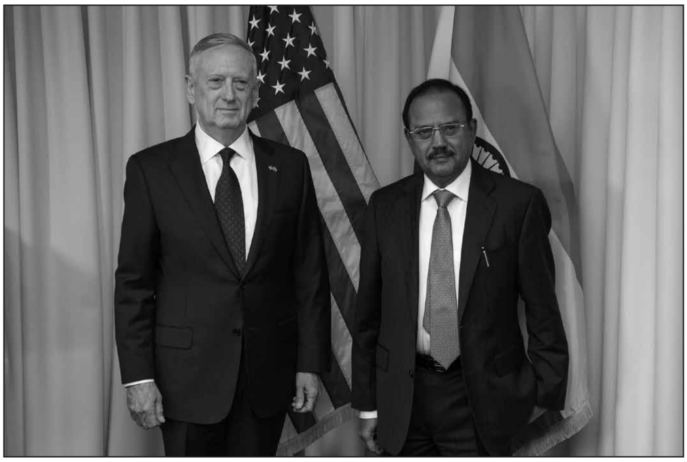
The Balakot camp on Jaba Top, away from any main populated centre. (AP)

Any Indian attack would effectively, call Pakistan's nuclear bluff which hoped that India would not retaliate militarily for terrorist attacks. India sought to calibrate its response in such a manner so as not to cross any of Pakistan's nuclear thresholds. Neither the spatial, military, political nor economic thresholds could conceivably be judged as crossed through limited Indian military action.

The strikes after Uri were modest in scale, scope and function. However, after Pulwama, India did not want to escalate its response into a full-scale war across both the International Border and LoC. In fact, it does not seem that any such option was even considered, though forces did go on alert along the International Border. Nevertheless, India was acutely conscious that its strike should not hit either Pakistani military targets or civilians. The strike had to be against a terrorist target and had to be limited in scope and scale. This had a direct impact on the nature of the airstrike and the selection of ordnance. In both cases, from a purely military standpoint, India's choices and overall posture were somewhat sub-optimal but these choices, as will be detailed, were made to avoid any significant escalation of the conflict.

Although calibrating its military response carefully, the CCS and other members of India's national security apparatus war-gamed a number of scenarios and whilst anticipating a Pakistani response, noted that this was likely to take place along the LoC or take the form of revitalising terror cells in Indian cities. Pakistani operations along the International Border were easier to handle as the rules of engagement and operation were much clearer and Indian forces were already on high levels of alert. The peculiar political status of the LoC, however, would always pose challenges for Indian military operations short of general war.

One of the requirements for an Indian military response was that it had to be demonstrable and effective in sending a message to Pakistan, Pakistani backed terrorist groups and the wider community, that India would no longer sit idly by and not respond to attacks from terrorist groups.[19] Avoidance of civilian casualties was of paramount priority to avoid international criticism, as well as to help to reduce the chances of escalation. This ensured that both the choice of targets and the weapons picked to strike those targets, would be hampered by this very important political consideration.[20]



The national security advisor Ajit Doval meets the Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis at the Pentagon, in Washington D.C., on 24 March 2017. (Jim Mattis)

Eventually, it was decided that the best option for a response that might not lead to war, would be a precision air strike on a known terrorist base camp which was isolated from other population areas. Following the cross-LoC Special Forces raids in the aftermath of the Uri attack, Pakistan moved terrorist camps away from near the LoC and began locating them deeper in Pakistan itself. This presented additional challenges as a target had to be identified that met Indian criteria whilst raising the prospect of IAF aircraft crossing the LoC and into Pakistan for the first time since 1971.[21] The choice of a target, the nature of that target and the ability of the IAF to hit the said target, all became critical factors in developing the Indian response

Selecting a Target

NSA Doval requested that the Indian external intelligence service, R&AW, consult its dossier on LeT and JEM camps to suggest a list of possible targets. JEM headquarters at Bhawalpur, in Pakistani

Punjab, not far from Lahore, was considered but its proximity to the large urban centre rendered it unsuitable.[22] Two other potential targets were then examined. The first of these was a camp at Sawai Nallah in POK. This camp was the easiest of the potential targets to hit as Indian Special Forces teams were capable of infiltrating across the LoC and neutralising the camp. However, this camp was a relatively small target and, following the strikes in 2016, it was not deemed to be sufficiently active or important to conduct a risky strike across the LoC, relying on elite infantry with limited support from air assets and artillery.[23] The choice was inevitable, Balakot.

Balakot, located in mainland Pakistan, as opposed to POK and deep in the Khyber Pakhtunkwa province, held the Markaz Syed Ahmed Shaeed JEM training facility. It began operations in the early 2000s and was located on the crest of a ridge called Juba Top. It was isolated from main population centres and even nearby villages could only access the training camp along a poorly developed road network. It was deemed to be sufficiently isolated, unlike Bhawalpur, adequately important and the risk of innocent Pakistani civilians being killed was judged to be relatively low.[24] In many ways, it was possibly the best target India could have chosen but also very difficult.

The camp, being highly secluded and accessible only after a 3km climb, had been under observation and study for years by India's intelligence agencies and it had identified at least 10 buildings. The camp itself was spread over 6 acres of land and as such, was a sprawling complex with ample space for outdoor training facilities, classroom instruction, as well as an extensive indoctrination programme to train fairly large batches of terrorists at the same time. In addition, the camp conducted courses in the use of drones for terror attacks, water combat courses, conducted an advanced sniper course and also provided detailed instruction in the making of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). In this regard, the camp at Juba Top was effectively one of the JEM's most comprehensive terror training centres.

However, for India, despite these evident attractions, there were a few issues specific to the Balakot camp that made an attack upon it particularly important. India Today TV was given access to an intelligence report which seemed to indicate that there was a Pulwama link to the Balakot camp. Abhishek Bhalla of India Today wrote:

> In December 2017, Abdullah, the son of JEM chief Masood Azahar underwent advanced training here. Later, he did a 10-day refresher training at the camp. The camp was controlled by Masood Azhar's brother-in-law Yousuf Azhar, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said. The planning for the Pulwama attack was also done here, according to the report. 40 CRPF men were killed on February 14 when suicide bomber Adil Ahmed Dar rammed an explosive-laden vehicle in a bus which was transporting the CRPF convoy.[25]

The fact that the Balakot camp could be linked to the Pulwama attack, plus of course the possible presence of Masood Azhar's brother-in-law, made the target a lucrative one in the minds of Indian planners. Added into that mix was the possibility that over 200 terrorists could be at that camp and as such, it was too good an opportunity for India to miss.

However, the attack would, as pointed out above, not be an easy one and the planning, preparation an even the selection of ordnance would be crucial in ensuring some degree of success, particularly in ensuring that no aircraft were lost. Indeed, India tried to do something unexpected as Rahul Singh of the Hindustan Times, citing an official noted:

> Pakistan was expecting a response similar to the 2016 surgical strikes after the Uri suicide attack. It never imagined that India could launch air strikes deep inside its territory. That's why we took that route – to shock and surprise them.[26]

In planning the attack, the Indian government realised that it could not rely solely on its satellite imagery, signal intelligence and some aerial photography. To this end, India's well developed HUMINT (human intelligence) network came to the fore. India's two main intelligence agencies, the IB and the R&AW, placed its HUMINT assets on alert with particular attention being placed on the Balakot camp and the JEM. These assets reported that, by 20 February 2019, there was a movement of JEM cadres from the JEM headquarters at Bhawalpur to the Balakot camp increasing the latter's value.[27]

NSA Doval formed a number of teams to assist the IAF in planning its strike, with the IAF senior leadership being given up-to-date information from the IB and R&AW about the Balakot camp. Technical intelligence assets such as SIGINT and satellite imagery were also employed and arrangements made with friendly countries for high resolution satellite imagery.[28] This gave the IAF and Indian planners a decent level of detail about the camp and its environs. However, extensive reliance was placed on HUMINT to determine whether or not terrorists were present at the camp at the anticipated time of the IAF strike. Reliance on HUMINT is fraught with dangers but it is inevitable when attacks of this nature are planned.

India's NTRO, which has custody of the country's best satellite imagery and processing, as well as access to the best aerial reconnaissance through the ARC – R&AW's air wing – prepared a detailed plan of the Balakot camp, identifying buildings by function, training areas and dormitories.[29] This enabled the IAF's own satellite imagery analysts to turn information into a viable plan of attack against specific buildings, hoping to cause a level of targeted, accurate destruction, rather than blanket elimination of the entire JEM training camp.

However, the most useful information came from two sources, either from the IB or R&AW, who were able to infiltrate the camp itself for a three day period between 19 and 22 February. With these two individuals providing updated information to Indian authorities, it was established that not only was the camp a going concern, it also was getting ready to receive 200 more trainees as a new set of terrorist courses were to start. The two sources were able to identify the rooms in which instructors stayed and their input seemed to place the total number of terrorists, instructors and support staff at Balakot, at around 350.[30]

By 23 February, the target selection was finalised and the NSA was able to hold a detailed meeting with the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa and the head of the R&AW, Anil Dhasmana (known for some reason as Secretary R), to give the final instructions to prepare the strike. Shortly thereafter, all three chiefs of the Indian armed forces, and various other security agencies, were given instructions to prepare for any contingency, including increased terrorist strikes within India and Pakistani activity along the LoC.[31]

The IAF, Indian Army and Navy were placed on alert along the international borders and the LoC. In the latter case, whilst the Indian Army had substantial forces in place, in 2019 the IAF had limited assets and infrastructure – a shortcoming that would come

An ARC Bombardier Global 5000 Signals intelligence (SIGINT) aircraft. Extensively modified in Israel, this aircraft replaced the Gulfstream III SRA-1. (IAF)

to hurt them – along the LoC. IAF units from Rajasthan, Gujarat and Punjab increased their tempo of operations, which was promptly matched by the Pakistan Air Force and air defence network. This elaborate plan of deception had the dual function of safeguarding the international border as well as deceiving the PAF. In these two regards, it was successful, though less so on the LoC.

The most potent strike asset for precision work in the IAF was the Mirage 2000, three squadrons of which (Nos. 1, 7 and 9) were equipped with some 51 aircraft of the type. Already armed with Belouga submunitions, the Mirage 2000 fleet also easily accommodated Paveway LGB modifications and designator pods for laser-guided bomb delivery and had demonstrated the same. The ATLIS designator pod and Matra 1000kg Laser-guided bombs delivered with the aircraft, were deemed to be extremely effective but were also viewed as exceedingly expensive so were sparingly used. The aircraft saw service during the Kargil operations and its ability to deliver precision strikes was well known and the efficacy of the weapons aiming system on the aircraft enabled it to deliver even unguided ordnance with considerable accuracy. Old 1,000lb and newer 450kg bombs, alongside newer 250kg bombs were used, following clearance, and these three types of bomb were delivered using the Mirage 2000's onboard CCRP (Computer Controlled Release Point) sighting technique. Only nine LGBs were used during the entire Kargil conflict.[32]

Upgrades to the aircraft were in progress but at the time of the Balakot raid, were incomplete and some aircraft were rushed into service without teething problems being rectified. However, the ordnance for the aircraft was upgraded with several now capable of launching Spice penetration munitions and Crystal Maze stand-off missiles. The Super 530D BVR and R.550 WVR missiles had largely been replaced, though the former still soldiered on in some capacity. The R.550 was replaced on all aircraft with the Russian R-73.[33] The deep upgrade of the aircraft saw the introduction of the Mica BVR/ WVR missile in both its active radar and IR variants.[34] It should be noted that the IAF's stock of stand-off munitions, though considerable, precluded the lavish deployment of the Crystal Maze, owing to the possibility of it being needed for combat. At the time, the IAF lacked a long range, high-yield precision strike weapon as the Spice 2000 EO bombs systems, intended to penetrate bunkers, whilst accurate thanks to GPS guidance, did not have very large explosive warheads – only 95kg – making them somewhat less than ideal for use against an area target.

The Spice 2000's accuracy was very much dependent on the accuracy of the satellite imagery available to the planners. For this purpose, the IAF procured imagery with a 60cm resolution, the best that it could obtain at relatively short notice. Its ability to glide to a range of 60km, however, made it a very useful as a stand-off weapon for a cross-LoC raid. The Crystal Maze, a longer range (100km), was used as a back-up weapon in the hope that it would provide imagery for the strike.[35] However, weather was to intervene and foil this plan.

Additional support for the Mirages was provided by Su-30MKIs and MiG-29UPGs which were to provide a distraction, as well as providing air cover for the strike package. These aircraft, though slightly newer than the Mirage 2000s and capable in their own right, were deemed by the IAF to be far less versatile and capable for the kind of operational task that was envisaged.

Operation Bandar

On 24 February 2019, less than 48hrs before the actual attack, pilots of India's Mirage 2000 squadrons based at Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, were briefed about the mission and the target. Later, a Phalcon AEW system and an Il-78M tanker were dispatched from Agra to participate in a mock drill. All the aircraft involved then deployed to an airbase in Punjab rather than returning to the parent bases. The deception continued with the outgoing head of India's Western Air Command, Air Marshal C. Hari Kumar, being feted at a customary farewell banquet. Every effort was made to give the impression that all was normal.[36] It was anything but (as was soon to become apparent) as the strike, now codenamed Operation Bandar, was launched.

At approximately 0230 hrs on 26 February 2019, seven Mirages from Gwalior and five more from Punjab, flying in three separate but uneven flights, were launched against the Balakot camp in Pakistan. Six of these aircraft, upgraded Mirage 2000Is were armed strictly for air-to-air operations with Mica air-to-air missiles. Five other aircraft were armed with Spice 2000 glide bombs and the sixth with a Crystal Maze missile. Two AEW platforms were airborne in support of the strike force – a Phalcon out of Agra and an indigenous Netra

An Indian Air Force M-2000 Mirage taxis into position following a sortie during Cope India '04 exercise on 18 Febuary 2004. About 150 U.S. airmen were supporting the first bilateral fighter exercise between the two air forces in more than 40 years. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Keith Brown)

based out of Bathinda. As the Mirages flew in a circuit formation at low altitude to simulate a normal night-flying exercise, 10 more IAF fighters were launched. These included a force of Su-30MKIs from Halwara, which were to play a pivotal part in the operation, though not in a kinetic manner.[37]

With a total of 22 IAF fighters airborne, supported by two AEW platforms, three separate packs were formed – two with a mix of Mirages and Su-30s and one solely of Su-30s. This third pack of Su-30s, flew out of Punjab and into Rajasthan, at times turning towards Pakistan and all the time remaining highly visible of PAF radars. They turned in the direction of Bhawalpur – the city near the JEM HQ – and provoked the desired reaction from the PAF. Immediately, PAF F-16s flying out of Mushaf air base at Sarogdha became airborne to counter this threat.[38]

Shortly thereafter, a second pack of mixed Mirages and Su-30s turned south over Jammu and turned towards Sialkot and Lahore – two extremely important Pakistani cities. One part of this pack then broke away and using a different path, also followed a path that could target Bhawalpur. Once again, PAF F-16s were launched from Sargodha to deal with this possible threat.[39]

With PAF F-16s now committed to dealing with these two packs of Indian aircraft, a strike element of six Mirages crossed the LoC at low altitude in the Keran sector in Kupwara. The six aircraft spread out and crossed some 12–15km into POK to bring Jabba Top into range of their munitions. At 0328 hrs, the Mirages released their munitions from an altitude of 27,000 feet. Five aircraft launched their Spice 2000 bombs and began tracking them using infrared sensors. However, the sixth aircraft had to abort its launch of the Crystal Maze radar due to weather issues and, possibly software problems. The five Spice 2000 bombs flew steadily towards their targets at Balakot while the IAF Mirages began to plan their egress. At this point, the Phalcon AEW platform alerted the Mirages that three PAF JF-17s had been scrambled from Mihas air base at Kamra and were headed towards the six IAF aircraft. Even as the JF-17s became airborne, the Mirages turned around, reduced their altitude and got out of POK airspace and back into India – Operation Bandar was over, even as the bombs hit the Balakot camp.[40]

The Impact of the Attack

In the aftermath of the strike, Pakistan went on a PR campaign which claimed that there had been little or no damage to the camp and cited imagery from the Atlantic Council Planet Labs (San Francisco, USA), Europe Space Imaging, and Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), to support its version of events. The ASPI noted that three Indian bombs missed the target and provided evidence to show these misses. This certainly seems feasible but understates the number of Indian bombs used on the target and was as such, was only partly accurate.[41]

In contrast, India did not release any satellite imagery, apparently because the satellite used to obtain the imagery belonged to a foreign, albeit friendly country. However, at least some Indian journalists have seen the imagery. One of them, Snehesh Alex Philip, defence correspondent for the fiercely independent news portal, *The Print*, went on record to confirm his access to the imagery and the impact:

> Satellite images in possession of the government, and seen by *The Print*, clearly show that the Israeli Spice 2000 bombs, each of them weighing 900kg with 95kg of explosives, did drop on at least two targets. The images show small black holes in the roof of two of the targeted buildings that appear to be the entry points of the bombs, which are meant to take out heavily-fortified and underground command and control centres.[42]

When approached by the authors about the veracity of this information, Philip, who has proved to be a reliable reporter for some years, indicated that he would not have written his article if he had any doubts and if he had not seen the imagery with his own eyes. It should be noted, however, that this does not in any way refute the ASPI report, but rather adds a different perspective, as it merely notes that two targets were hit and to date, most post-strike imagery seems to cover only a portion of the sprawling camp, missing out an important building. This actually tallies with the number of weapons used and would appear to indicate that there were three misses and two hits on targets. In this regard, the ASPI report and Philip's report in *The Print*, are entirely consistent with each other and suggest that much of the debate over the damage inflicted is based on accurate but incomplete, assessments. At the outset, any pretence that this was anything other than a JEM site was rendered irrelevant when confirmation of the JEM camp being hit by India was given by none other than Masood Azhar's brother, Maulana Ammar.[43]

Pakistan took journalists on a choreographed tour of the camp, or at least part of the camp, but did so some 43 days after the Indian strike – certainly sufficient time to repair damage and clear evidence. One journalist familiar with the site, Francesca Marino (who will

The EMB-145 AEW airplane, known as 'Netra' is an Embraer project, but with all electronics customised by India. This aircraft bears the military registration KW3555. (Venkat Mangudi)

An IAF Mirage 2000 is displayed at Aero India 2009. Still without being modernised, this aircraft is shown alongside two air-to-air missiles of French origin (Magic and Super 530D), as well as a targeting pod under the right intake. (aztonyx)

become more important later on), pointed out several issues which seemed to indicate that the journalists were not shown the full camp and that it had been sanitised.[44] One Indian analyst pointed out that the journalists were shown the mosque and the madrassa complex rather than the JEM trainee accommodation hall, located further north in the complex and that this hall was the target of the two bombs that hit their respective marks.[45] This is quite feasible.

Such controlled access and limits on reporting and journalistic activities were a hallmark of post-strike Pakistani efforts and as such, absent of full disclosure of India's satellite photos, the physical evidence that is available for examination, provide no conclusive proof of either damage to the camp or lack thereof. In addition is the peculiar damage profile of Spice guided bombs which leave small entry holes as compared to more conventional bombs.

However, there is a significant body of circumstantial evidence to suggest that at least some damage was done to the camp and that there was a concerted effort to cover up said damage. Indian journalists, from the independent news channel India Today, produced a series of recordings they called The Balakot Tapes and at least extracts of these were made public.[46] It should be emphasised that India Today has a long tradition of independent journalism and should never be viewed as a propaganda outlet and has a record of investigative journalism.

The journalists claimed that Pakistani residents in the nearby area noted that at least four Pakistani Army personnel were killed in the attack and that two people, mosque worker Naem Mohammed and Cleric Rehman confirmed damage and casualties with Rehman being quoted as saying, 'A building was damaged. Yes, everyone got up, the sound of explosions was so loud that everyone came out of their homes … There were four explosions, everybody was scared it was 'Qayamat ka Manzar' (Doomsday moment).'[47]

Not to be outdone, a rival news channel, the largely pro-BJP Republic network, conducted its own investigation into the Balakot strikes and produced its own Balakot tapes, the full transcript and audio recording of which are available to the public. These tapes suggested a rapid disposal of bodies by the Pakistan Army – including mass graves and cremations – the confiscation of mobile phones and a disabling of the internet being among the steps taken in the aftermath of the strike to conceal its impact. Interviewed by Republic, an eyewitness source, whose name was withheld, stated:

> In the recent strike by the Indian forces in Balakot, whoever was targeted, I know almost all of them. Most of those who have been killed are linked to Jaish-e-Mohammed. Almost all those who have been killed are from Jaish-e-Mohammed, almost all of them. I'm going to share some of their names, please keep them in mind. Mainshah Abdar Zak, Lahore's Major Retd Havar Rana, Altaf Ali Chaudhary from Karachi, Mudassar Ali from Rawalpindi, Ustad Mohsin from Bahawalpur, Datta Khel's Tafail Dost. Two brothers from Dhannu Ali Khatak and Bahadur Khatak. They were two brothers who have been killed. A top commander of Jaish from Gujranwala has been killed. He was a crucial Jaish leader. Software expert Rana Mohsin Ali, Mianwali's Tafiq Umar, Moin Ali, Sardar Suhail, Dera Ghazi Khan's Capt. Retd Mushtaq, Mandi Bawaldeen's Sheheryaar Deen, a special video editor from model town in Karachi's Tahir Ali Sheikh. An IED expert from Dera Ismail Khan called 'Engineer Rana'. I have only named a few of them till now. These are the names I am aware of. These are the name I have details about.[48]

Given the timing of the two sets of Balakot Tapes, it is debatable whether both channels used the same sources and whether or not there was a duplication of evidence and perhaps, interpretation of that evidence. Source-based accounts have potential for unreliability but cannot be ignored.

If these journalistic endeavours are deemed to be insufficiently 'unbiased' due to their provenance, some corroboration for their claims, if not more, came from Italian journalist and veteran South Asia correspondent, Francesca Marino. Days after the attack, she claimed, on the WION news channel, that her sources had confirmed that some 35 dead bodies had been carried away from the site of the attack.[49] However, nearly two months after, Marino on her personal website, *Stringer Asia*, wrote the following (reproduced in full as it provides a detailed, albeit source-based account of what might have happened at Balakot):

> Despite Pakistan's efforts to deceive the world on the Indian airstrikes on the Jaish-e-Muhammad camp, small details of what happened in Balakot in the wee hours of February 26 and thereafter have kept trickling in from my source. This article is an attempt to piece together all the information I gathered and to fill the gaps into what it has become the jigsaw puzzle of the Balakot strike.
>
> As it is well known now, the IAF strike was carried out at around 3.30 am. According to my information, an Army unit, from their camp in Shinkiari, arrived at the location of the strike on February 26 at around 6 am, two and a half hours later. Shinkiari is around 20kms away from Balakot, and the Army unit would have taken around 35–40 minutes to reach the location from where the climb to the camp begins. Incidentally, Shinkiari is also a base of the Pakistan Army, with the Junior Leaders Academy located there.
>
> Immediately after the Army unit arrival, the injured were taken to a Harkat-ul-Mujahideen camp, located in Shinkiari and treated by Pakistan Army doctors. Local sources say around 45 persons are still undergoing treatment in this camp, while around 20 have died during treatment due to serious injuries. Those who have recovered are still in custody of the Army and have not been discharged. Based on the different inputs that have been gathered over the last several weeks through my contact, it can now also be safely said that the impact of the strike immediately killed a large number of JEM cadres. The numbers estimated have ranged from 130–170, including those who have died during treatment. Those killed included 11 trainers, ranging from bomb makers to those imparting weapons training. Two of these trainers were from Afghanistan. To prevent news on the fatalities leaking through statements of family members of cadres, a group of JEM members also visited the families of those killed and handed over cash compensation to them. Adjacent to the Blue Pine Hotel, located on the foothill from where one starts the trek for the JEM camp, is a freshly painted signboard that indicates the presence of the Taleem-ul-Quran on the hilltop. Unlike the earlier board, all links to JEM leader and now internationally proscribed terrorist Masood Azhar has been removed. The camp area is still under the control of the Army, with a Captain rank officer of the Mujahid battalion in command. The access to the dust track leading to the camp is still restricted, even to the local police. Apart from a few children and 3–4 teachers, the camp has been cleared of any traces of it earlier being a JEM camp. Meanwhile, inhabitants of Bisian township, near the JEM camp, still discuss of some locals having noticed vehicles dumping rubble in the Kunhar River during the first night after the strike. There is also talk about the JEM leadership having assured its cadres that the group will take its revenge when the time is ripe'.[50]

Is Marino's account complete proof of damage to the JEM camp? No. However, neither it nor Indian accounts are inconsistent with ASPI reports of three bombs missing. In assessing whether or not the Indian strike had any significant impact, therefore, it is submitted that the evidence has to be viewed as a whole. Satellite imagery is but one factor in making an assessment and other evidence, source-based or otherwise, cannot be ignored, though any such evidence, is of course, by itself inconclusive. In any event, what is certain, however, is that a choreographed visit by journalists 43 days after the strikes, proved nothing and was a manipulated show for the purposes of public relations.

However, Pakistan was quick to respond with a retaliatory strike all its own that was brilliant, innovative and ultimately grabbed the headlines for a while.

Operation Swift Retort

India was certain that a military response from Pakistan would occur shortly after the attacks in Balakot on 26 February. The increase in tension followed in the coming hours, when both countries reported provocative manoeuvres practised by fighters, without exceeding the LoC. In addition, an IAF SPYDER SAM squadron in the Kutch area of Gujarat, shot down a Burraq reconnaissance drone of the PAF which crashed near the village of Ambosa.[51]

On the ground, Pakistan and India fired over the LoC: two Pakistani soldiers were killed and 10 Indians were wounded. Tensions continued to rise as India's expectation of retaliatory action grew. The military response came shortly after: the Pakistani government opted for air-only action, targeting Indian military positions on ground and tackling IAF aircraft. The operation, which was planned by respected Air Marshal Haseeb Paracha, aimed to:[52]

1. Employ PAF fighters to achieve local air supremacy and ensure that Pakistanis attack indigenous lines and get away with it;
2. Block Indian air defence elements, preventing them from interfering in subsequent PAF attacks;
3. Combat Indian BARCAP missions in POK to prevent Indian aircraft from crossing LoC for retaliation;
4. Engage and shoot down Indian aircraft, chasing off the Su-30 and avoiding the Mirage 2000Is on CAP.

Around 0915 hrs local time, a package composed of several groups of aircraft, divided between four and eight aircraft each and led by a Pakistani Air Marshal flying in a 2000 SAAB, began taking off from the air bases of Kamra, Murid, Chandler, Sarghoda, Rafiq and Jacobabad, heading to the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir. The goal was to attack 16 Indian positions located at the top of Krishna Ghat, near Poonch, the headquarters of the Bhimber Gali Brigade and the Indian Army ammunition depot at Narian.

In total, more than 30 aircraft were employed – 12 F-16s, 12 JF-17s, eight Mirages 5, two Saab 2000 Erieye and an uncertain number of Dassault Falcon 20s (also 'DA-20'). Mission planners believed the IAF could not detect their approach or respond to the attack in time, thus leaving the airspace of Pakistani interest unprotected, except for few fighters in the northern sectors of Jammu and Kashmir. With the Mirage 5 and Mirage III DAs equipped with Raptor IIID NESCOM H-2 and H-4 stand-off weapons, whilst the JF-17s had GIDS REK MK-83 GBUs, they planned to attack from ranges of 40 to 70km from the targets.[53]

Around 0952 hrs, Indian air traffic in Bathinda detected 'abnormal' activity on the Pakistani side. Some Pakistani aircraft had tried to distract Indian air control by linking their IFF transponders, drawing attention to themselves by identifying themselves as PAF aircraft. Around 1000 hrs, the first formation approached Akhnoor's LoC with two others heading towards the LoC, attempting to penetrate the Indian airspace in the vicinity of Poonch and Anupgarh.

Faced with an imminent threat, the IAF acted quickly to the north, scrambling four MiG-21 Bison and two MiG-29UPG fighters from Srinagar and Awantipur respectively, to support two other Mirage 2000I (formation with call-sign 'Ironman'), and two Su-30MKIs from No. 15 Squadron (call-sign 'Avenger') were which were already on their CAP-stations. It is believed that unlike the other Indian aircraft, the first pair of MiG-21s (Alpha 1 and 2) had not been detected by Pakistani warning aircraft, because they were hidden by high mountains while still at low altitude. The first Bison took off at 1001 hrs, followed by the second, two minutes later: both flew under the Pakistani radar horizon, hidden behind the Pir Panjal mountains while approaching the nearest formation of PAF aircraft.[54]

After crossing the LoC shortly after 1000 hrs, one of the Pakistani F-16s from the first group that violated Indian airspace was chased by one of the Su-30s approaching from south of where the intrusion took place and also by a MiG-21 Bison from No. 51 Squadron, from the north. At that point in time, the Pakistani Air Force deployed electronic warfare, while – knowing the IAF's rules of engagement – F-16s commenced their attack by firing several AIM-120Cs from high altitude and at maximum range. Both sides agree that the Su-30MKI with call-sign 'Avenger 1' returned to base after evading three missiles. The Indians claim that the wingman, 'Avenger 2' successfully evaded another.

Meanwhile, in the northern sector of the LoC, one of the F-16s fired another AIM-120C at the MiG-21 with call-sign 'Alpha 2': still inside own airspace, the plane evaded detection by flying outside the missile's no escape zone. One of these AIM-120Cs eventually crashed in the village of Mamankote Mallas in India, causing an explosion that put debris within a 100 metre radius.[55]

As far as is known, IAF pilots did not fire a single air-to-air missile in return. The reason was that in the game of 'hot and cold', their R-77s were outraged and as such, they tried to deploy their infra-red homing R-27s from the maximum engagement envelope of that weapon's seeker head. Obviously, this was a risky decision considering the Pakistani AIM-120C-5s. However, they still managed to keep the enemy busy: whenever the Su-30s 'turned hot' – i.e., towards the opponent – the F-16s were forced to 'turn cold', i.e., away, in order to thwart their efforts. Ultimately, the Pakistani claim for one Su-30 to have been shot down remains without any merit or evidence.

Further south, eight JF-17s faced just two Mirage 2000Is, one of which was experiencing radar problems and broke off the engagement but were unable to engage. Meanwhile, at 1004 hrs, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, flying as 'Alpha-1', climbed to 15,000ft while keeping his IFF-transponder off. While accelerating to a speed of about 900km/h, he crossed the LoC. The Pakistanis were late in detecting the lonesome interceptor because it remained hidden until climbing above the nearby mountain peaks. What happened over the next few seconds remains a matter of intense debates. According to the IAF, Abinandan then engaged one of Pakistani F-16s, selected one of his R-73s and fired. India claims that his last recorded transmission had been, 'R-73 selected', and that a two-seater F-16 was shot down.

Despite frantic calls by Indian GCI to break-off the attack, excellent PAF ECM thwarted the radio calls. However, Abhinandan's attack forced the PAF strike package to jettison at least 11 MK83REK and H-4SOW guided bombs – two each in Kishan Ghati, Bhimber Ghali, Keesbowl and Tackundi Bown along with one in Rajouri, one in Narian and the last at Bharat Gala – and beat a hasty retreat, well before reaching its initial points and thus, without causing any damage, or at least inconvenience to the Indian Army.[56]

The only Pakistani to attempt fighting the lonesome MiG was piloted by Wing Commander Nauman Ali Khan, who fired one AIM-120C-5 as Abhinandan crossed the LoC. The Indian pilot flew a U-shaped curve and then a high-g barrel roll in attempt to evade but was nevertheless hit. Available evidence is indicative of Abhinandan's MiG-21 Bison being hit over Sandar and crashing outside Horan.

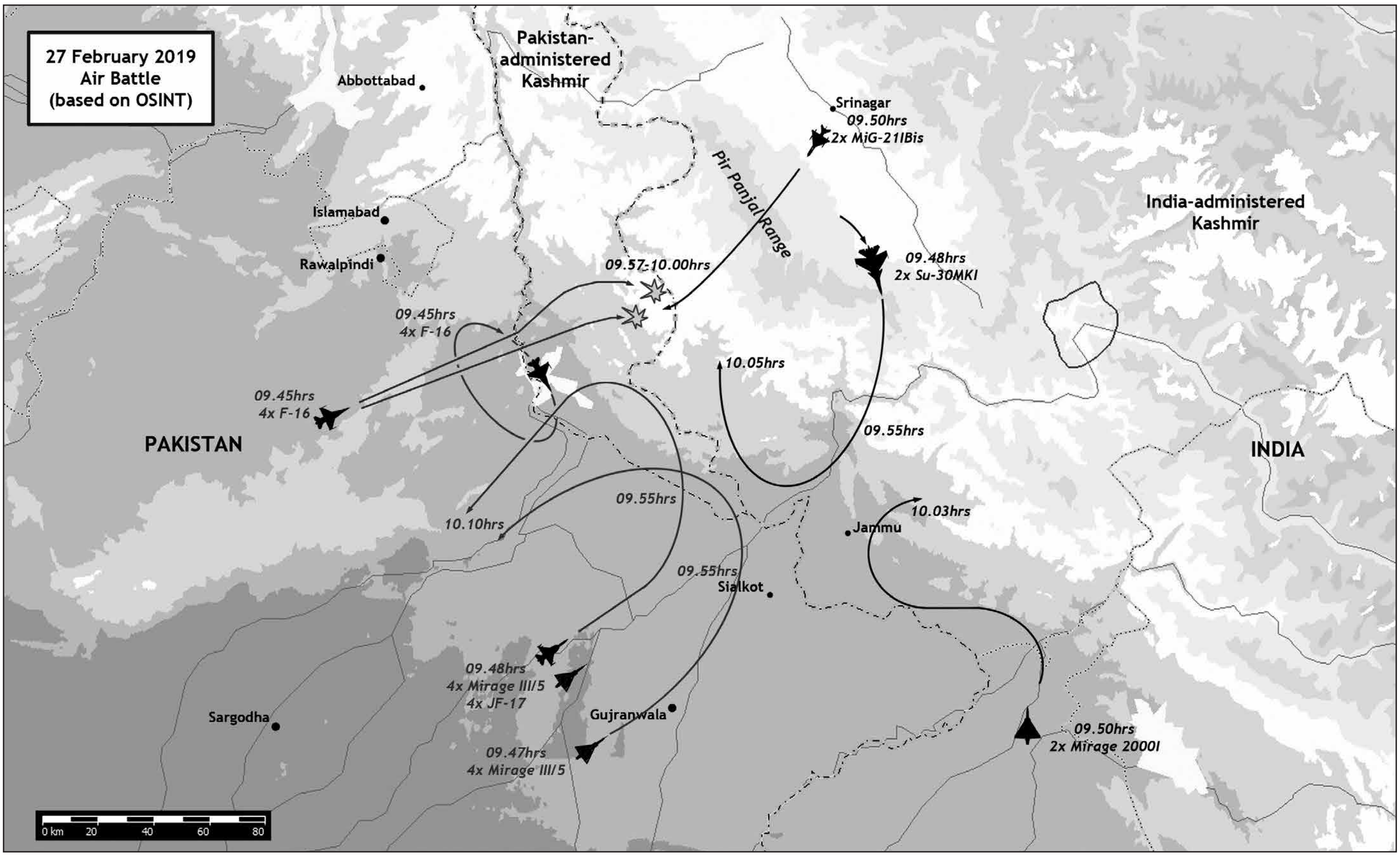
Ejecting safely, the IAF pilot landed under his parachute and attempted to avoid civilians converging on him. Eventually, he was captured, beaten and brought to one of the Pakistani Army bases nearby. Abhinandan was released a few days later: Pakistan stressed, quite calmly, that he was 'arrested' and 'not a prisoner of war', thus indicating its willingness to de-escalate.

The loss of the MiG-21Bison was not the only tragedy to befall the IAF on that day. Thanks to a total miscommunication between Srinagar ATC and an IAF SPYDER SAM squadron, an IAF Mi-17V5, which was flown by Siddharth Vashisht and co-pilot Ninad Mandvgane, was shot down at 1010 hrs by a SPYDER surface-to-air missile. At the time of this book being written, the court martial is in progress.[57]

The Debate Over the IAF's F-16 Claims

India's claims for an F-16 are based on circumstantial evidence. One of the most interesting, and to date not refuted, pieces of evidence was from the DG ISPR Major General Asif Gafoor who wrote:

A PAF JF-17 Block I at Sargoda. Currently the Pakistani Air Force is already receiving the JF-17 Block III. (Code 16)


27 February 2019
Air Battle
(based on OSINT)
Abbottabad
Pakistan-administered Kashmir
Srinagar
09.50hrs
2x MiG-21Bis
Pir Panjal Range
India-administered Kashmir
Islamabad
Rawalpindi
09.57-10.00hrs
09.48hrs
2x Su-30MKI
09.45hrs
4x F-16
09.45hrs
4x F-16
10.05hrs
PAKISTAN
09.55hrs
INDIA
09.55hrs
10.10hrs
10.03hrs
Jammu
09.55hrs
Sialkot
09.48hrs
4x Mirage III/5
4x JF-17
Sargodha
Gujranwala
09.47hrs
4x Mirage III/5
09.50hrs
2x Mirage 2000I
0 km 20 40 60 80

This map depicts the air engagement of 27 February 2019. (Map by Tom Cooper)

> In response to the PAF attacks this morning, as disclosed by the MoFA, the IAF crossed the LoC. PAF shot down two Indian aircraft inside Pakistani airspace. One of the planes crashed inside AJ&K while another crashed inside the IOK. An Indian pilot was trapped by troops on the ground while the second was still being sought in the area[58]

Gafoor's mention of a second pilot – *Doosra Banda* – remains one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the downing of a second aircraft in this clash. Since the IAF did not lose any jets except Abhinandan's MiG-21 Bison, this second fighter-bomber must have been a PAF F-16. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that the IAF eventually released the imagery of radar plots from one of its Phalcon AEW aircraft, confirming the sudden disappearance of one of the Pakistani jets.[59]

Other suggestive circumstantial evidence includes videos, recorded at three different locations – Charnoi, Thanamandi and Khuriatta – that show the same event, at different geographical points and at different times. At Charnoi and Thanamandi there was a trail of smoke in the form of a 'tadpole' falling to earth.[60] Another bit of circumstantial evidence of a possible F-16 loss was the fact that a serving USAF airman – Master Sergeant Kyle Wilson – was decorated for his work while in Pakistan, including 'preventing the loss of technology on the F-16'.[61] The period of time for which he was decorated was at the time of events of 26–27 February. While there was no obvious evidence, these events were too much to be dismissed as 'unimportant'.

A formation of F-16 Fighting Falcons from the Pakistan Air Force head to the fight after refuelling 21 July during Red Flag 10-4. (Steven Wolff)

Wing Commander Abhinandan's MiG-21Bison's wreckage. (ISPR)

Both sides decorated involved pilots: Pakistan awarded Squadron Leader Hassan Mahmood Siddiqui the Tamgha-i-Jur'at for his unsubstantiated Su-30MKI-claim, whilst Noman Ali Khan was awarded the Sitara-i-Jur'at for the more legitimate kill of the IAF MiG-21. India awarded Abhinandan the Vir Chakra, ostensibly for his F-16 kill but in all probability, more in recognition of his efforts thwarting the Pakistani strike package before they could effectively engage their targets.

When Pakistan presented evidence of the wreckage of the MiG-21 Bison shot down in POK, this included video footage and photos showing only three AAMs – one R-73 and two R-77s. This would seem to indicate that one R-73 was either not recovered intact or not at all because Abhinandan fired it. To make matters worse, Islamabad then involved itself in ever more controversies.

On 25 February 2020, the Pakistan Air Force again presented parts of the Mig-21's missiles, as well as a video by a sympathetic British journalist – involved in publishing public-media releases for the PAF for more than 10 years – to reinforce the thesis that the MiG-21 Bison had crashed with all the missiles intact. The said journalist slavishly reported the PAF account without contradiction or objective analysis, thus adding further substance to either version. With one exception: unlike photos released by Islamabad in 2019, the video from 2020 showed the serial numbers of R-73s – but also a part of a missile never shown on previous occasions.

Unsurprisingly, considering all the controversies spread by the Pakistani officials already before, this raised suspicions that a possible substitution through a replacement had occurred and that the shown piece was a manipulation run to bolster a particular narrative. Once again, there was no firm evidence for either version; only the usual mass of inconsistencies.[62]

The Aftermath

The impact of the Balakot raid cannot be gleaned purely from damage assessments or an air skirmish the next day. The Balakot air strike demonstrated that India was now willing to use its military forces in a targeted manner and would not necessarily be deterred by Pakistan's nuclear threats. Moreover, the fact that India was willing to use military force inevitably altered the stakes for Pakistan's approach to the use of terrorist groups like the JEM against India.

Militarily, in the aftermath of the Balakot raid, both India and Pakistan began aggressive surveillance of the other side, including their early warning and electronic warfare systems, along with UAVs. The activity of the latter eventually reached a point at which the IAF deployed its No.116 HU equipped with Rudra armed helicopters to intercept and destroy several UAVs. Furthermore, on 4 March 2019, an IAF Su-30MKI shot down a Pakistan Navy drone with an R-73 AAM.[63]

The Balakot raid showed up strengths and weaknesses in the IAF with the force being innovative and determined but having enough deficiencies – like the lack of secure communications – which the Air Force spent the following two years to remedy, introducing upgrades and acquiring new weapons, all the while grappling with decreasing numbers. Furthermore, the IAF was forced to examine its weapons – in particular, its air-to-air missiles of Russian origin, to check their reliability and performance after shortcomings were observed in combat. This set in train a substantial overhaul and modernisation programme which is still ongoing.

However, the real impact of the Pulwama terrorist attack, the Balakot strike and its aftermath, came some months later when India took a decision that would completely alter the political landscape in Jammu and Kashmir.

A New Political Phase

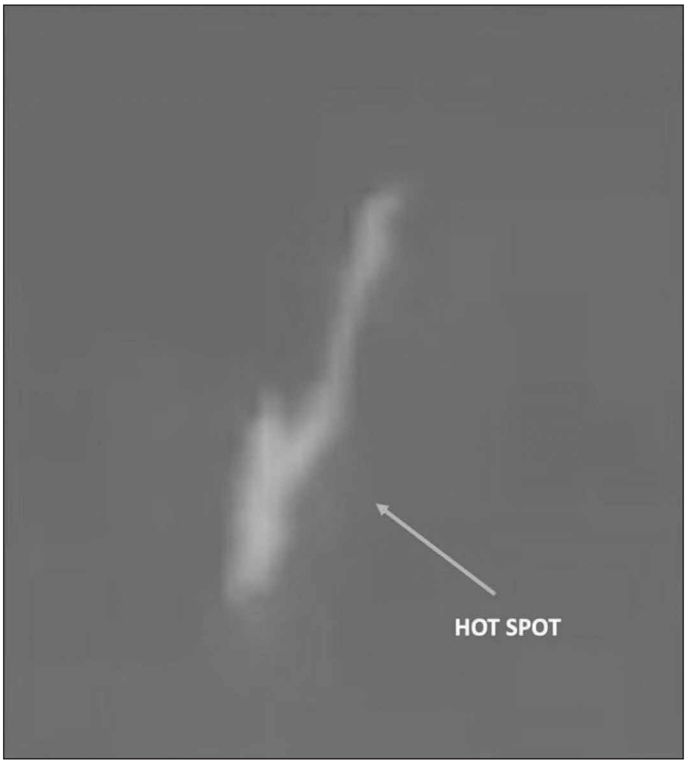
India's 2019 General Election, held between 11 April and 19 May 2019 with results being declared on 23 May, were won convincingly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP, which won a majority of seats on its own for the second time in a row, increasing its total by some 20 seats, with breakthroughs in many States. The Balakot strike played a role in Modi's victory with voters appreciating the effort to strike back at Pakistan. However, its role was minor, with Modi winning largely on the success of his extremely effective targeted welfare programmes aimed at providing amenities to India's poorest. Modi's electoral agenda had received the approval of India's voters.

From 2019 to the time of writing, Pakistan found itself on FATF's 'Grey List', although that is likely to change. In addition, even before the Indian General Election concluded, India scored a major diplomatic victory when, despite efforts by China to obstruct the process at Pakistan's request, the JEM leader, Masood Azhar, was finally designated a United Nations 'Global Terrorist'.[64] This has led to additional steps to freeze JEM assets and restrict the travel of their personnel. However, the biggest political shock was yet to come.

Ending Jammu and Kashmir's Special Status

On 5 August 2019, after reinforcing the state with several thousand troops from India's CAPFs, the Government of India, taking advantage of the collapse of the State's elected government thanks to its own contradictions, revoked the special status given to the State of Jammu and Kashmir accorded to it under Articles 35 and 370 of the Indian Constitution. These provisions had been eroded over the decades but a few issues, mainly pandering to Kashmiri xenophobia remained intact. The second Modi government was

Wing Commander Abhinandan after his arrest. (ISPR)



The 'tadpole' – possibly a PAF F-16 going down? Based on the location where the observer captured the video, many researchers from the OSINT line stress that this smoke trail could not have been related to Abihandan's MiG-2. (Cybersug Youtube)

intent on removing these remaining provisions. It did so by the following order:

> THE CONSTITUTION (APPLICATION TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR) ORDER, 2019
> C.O. 272
>
> In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of article 370 of the Constitution, the President, with the concurrence of the Government of State of Jammu and Kashmir, is pleased to make the following Order: —
>
> 1. (1) This Order may be called the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.
>
> (2) It shall come into force at once and shall thereupon supersede the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954 as amended from time to time.
>
> 2. All the provisions of the Constitution, as amended from time to time, shall apply in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir and the exceptions and modifications subject to which they shall so apply shall be as follows: –
>
> To article 367, there shall be added the following clause, namely: –
>
> '(4) For the purposes of this Constitution as it applies in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir –
>
> (a) references to this Constitution or to the provisions thereof shall be construed as references to the Constitution or the provisions thereof as applied in relation to the said State;
>
> (b) references to the person for the time being recognised by the President on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly of the State as the Sadar-i-Riyasat of Jammu and Kashmir, acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers of the State for the time being in office, shall be construed as references to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir;
>
> (c) references to the Government of the said State shall be construed as including references to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir acting on the advice of his Council of Ministers; and
>
> (d) in proviso to clause (3) of article 370 of this Constitution, the expression 'Constituent Assembly of the State referred to in clause (2)' shall read 'Legislative Assembly of the State'.
>
> RAM NATH KOVIND,
> President.[65]

At one stroke, this rendered the effects of Articles 35 and 370 of the Indian Constitution largely meaningless and allowed for the full effect of the Indian Constitution to take effect in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. This also allowed hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people, domiciled in the region for decades, to obtain proper certification to enable them to vote and to own property in the State. Shortly thereafter, the Indian government passed a Reorganisation Act which turned the State into two Union Territories – Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.

These efforts were, as was expected, met with condemnation from Pakistan and its ally China whilst being criticised by some in the Indian Opposition. However, this step was part of the BJP's electoral manifesto for decades and should not have come as a surprise. Court challenges were mounted and remain pending as of 2022 even as delimitation for new elections is on the verge of completion.

Within the new Union Territories, Ladakh and Jammu – with Buddhist and Hindu majorities – welcomed the moves whilst the valley of Kashmir seethed with anger, prompting India to suspend internet communications and make use of preventative detention of political agitators. However, what was surprising was that violence

Indian CRPF personnel in Srinagar immediately after the removal of the State's special status. (PIB)

and large-scale protests were not forthcoming and fortunately, there was no large-scale bloodshed.

As far as terrorism is concerned, there have been many infiltration attempts, increasing after the precipitous US withdrawal from Afghanistan. There has also been an increase in attacks on returning Kashmiri Hindus and Sikhs, leading to aggressive counter-measures by Indian forces. The dispute over Kashmir continues to prevent any rapprochement between India and Pakistan and despite some symbolic action, the leadership and infrastructure of the jihadi factory remains intact and supported by the Pakistani government. Despite Islamabad's open flirting with international Jihadism, in late 2022, Pakistan is set to be removed from the FATF 'Grey List', opening the possibility of renewed terrorist attacks in India and the release of many of the terrorists arrested and incarcerated in Pakistan.

However, there has been no major mass casualty terrorist attack either in Kashmir or the rest of India since 2019 – either against a military or civilian target. Perhaps the spectre of Indian retaliation has forced a change in approach? It is too early to come to that conclusion but it presents an interesting hypothesis.

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